

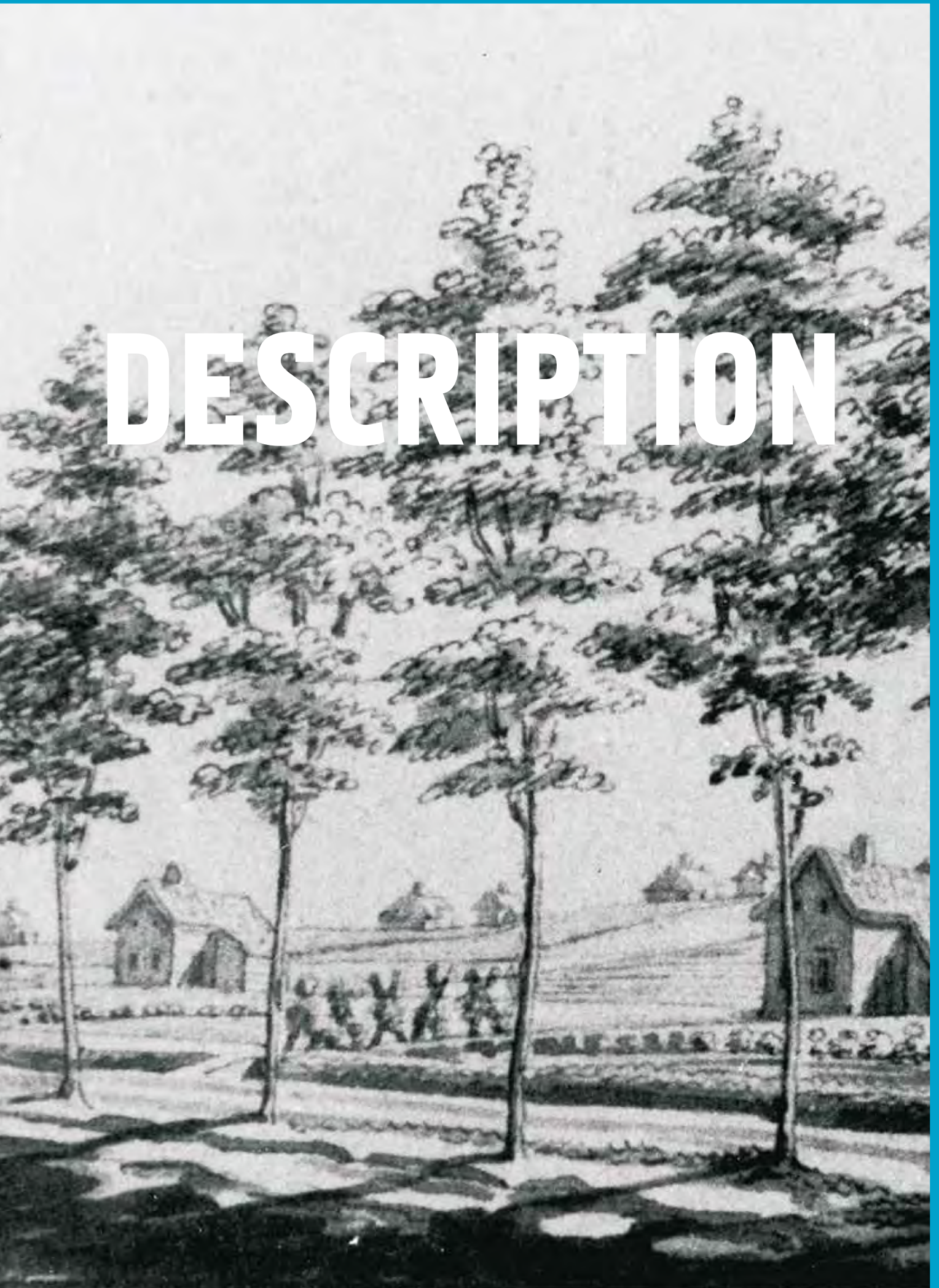


Kingdom of Belgium and Kingdom of the Netherlands

COLONIES OF BENEVOLENCE

World Heritage Nomination

DESCRIPTION



INTRODUCTION – MAIN THEMES

Section 2. a provides the general description of the series of 3 selected component parts which best convey the distinctive qualities of the landscapes of the Colonies of Benevolence as they are now.

The description of the Colonies of Benevolence focuses on their qualities as landscapes of ambitions, and the intertwining themes which combine to define their proposed Outstanding Universal Value:

- Domestic agricultural colonies, designed as edifying model environments for the poor, which have been a catalyst for key developments in custodial care
- Carefully arranged as panoptic landscapes

Section 2. b sets out the history of development (of all 7 historic Colonies of Benevolence).

→

A rational agricultural landscape with trees in line (W.V.)



2.a

DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY

↓
Hooiweg in Wilhelminaoord
(K.v.W.)

↓
Koningin Wilhelminalaan in
Frederiksoord, begin of the
20th century (p.o.D.)

I THE CHARACTER OF THE COLONIES OF BENEVOLENCE TODAY: RELICTS IN LIVING LANDSCAPES

The concept of the Colonies of Benevolence, an Enlightenment experiment in social reform, demonstrated an innovative, highly influential model of pauper relief and of settler colonialism – the agricultural domestic colony.

The Colonies of Benevolence created an idealised Dutch landscape out of isolated peat and heath wastelands through the domestic colonisation of paupers. In the process, colonists were to become morally reformed ideal citizens, adding to the nation's wealth and integrating marginal territories in emergent nation states. Over a seven-year period, almost 80 square kilometres of wastelands, domestic territory considered unfit for settlement, were reclaimed. The process of transforming the poorest landscapes and citizens through a utopian process of social engineering went on over a century-long period.

To implement this experiment, a panoptic disciplinary system for pauper settlers was developed, resulting in a basic transformation of penal systems that spread throughout Europe. The innovative disciplinary system adopted was to rehabilitate and morally transform 'degenerate' paupers into ideal productive citizens. This panoptic disciplinary



system is manifested in the organisation of the landscape that settlers had to create for their own support. The model fostered important associated sciences (including criminology, penology, physical anthropology and agronomy) as manifested in on-site laboratories and educational institutions.

This Dutch model of 'domestic colonies' soon spread to most other European nations, but particularly to France and Germany, where it was adapted for use with other marginalised sectors of the population such as juvenile delinquents, psychiatric patients and the disabled. The major social significance of the Colonies of Benevolence is thus to be found in their continuing impact on almost all forms of custodial care practised in Europe.

Today, these remote rural areas no longer function as confined pauper colonies, but have evolved into 'special' neighbourhoods of ordinary villages, where ordinary people live, work and recreate. Still, they stand out in the sense that they convey, both in their appearance and in their functioning, the core values of the historical social project of the Colonies of Benevolence.

In addition to the strikingly rhythmic and ordered landscapes, which present a clear contrast with their environment, social economy and custodian care continue to determine the economic landscape of the area, next to agricultural businesses, forestry, natural areas and cultural tourism. Historic houses and functional buildings in carefully ordered green environments create an estate-like atmosphere. All together, they account for the special story of agricultural innovation, nature shaped by man and hard labour carried out by the countless poor that were sent to these areas with the prospect of a new life.

2 SPECIAL QUALITIES: RURAL LANDSCAPES OF AMBITION, DESIGNED FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

A MODEL OF AN EDIFYING ENVIRONMENT FOR URBAN POOR

The Colonies of Benevolence present large areas of ordered plots of bocage farmland and forestry, with series of similar-style historic houses, farms and buildings, and impressive straight planted avenues. Even to the casual eye it is clear that their appearance is the result of a systematic planning approach in the past.

One would rather expect such designed settlements in an urban, industrial environment, but they were and are situated in remote rural areas, and their core economic activities were centred on agricultural and forestry production.

They look like a model environment – and they were. Their systematic, curated arrangement was intended to be an edifying environment for urban poor – who could live, work, worship and recreate in one and the same place, and be elevated in these distinctive surroundings. The agricultural environment was instrumental in this process: people would be transformed through the interaction with the land. "Man creates the land and the land creates Man".

The systematic set-up creates a strong contrast with the immediate surroundings and with the urban contexts where the colonists had come from. The Colony had to represent a break with their former life. The order and regularity of the new environment was to encourage the colonists to lead a regular life with strong work ethics.

These places have intriguing additional features, such as crossroads with a specific layout, curated details in the houses, rare combinations of churches, unconventionally ordered cemeteries... all kinds of striking features which stimulate curiosity and

make people want to familiarise themselves with the uncommon story behind these far from ordinary places which were created to foster social change and to become productive agricultural communities.

SYMMETRY, REPETITION AND HIERARCHY TO CREATE HARMONY AND ORDER

The linear design, emphasised by long, parallel avenues and waterways with parallel, rhythmically ordered planting, is reinforced by the placement of the buildings at regular intervals. This creates a sense of order and harmony.

Avenues

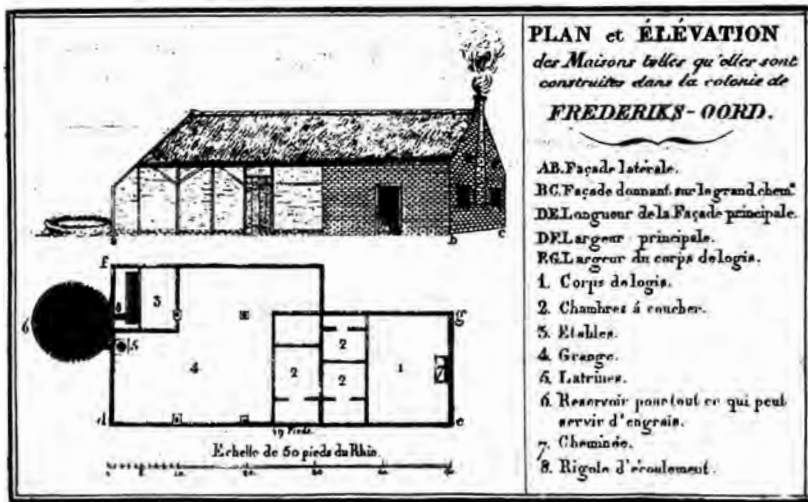
In the current Colonies of Benevolence landscapes the most striking, recurrent structuring elements are straight planted avenues.

This is a very common element in ancient rural landscapes in the region, in order to provide shade, beauty and eventually timber, and to act as a barrier for the wind across the open agricultural land. Elsewhere, these have often disappeared, due to the intensification of traffic and modern legislation for the arrangement of roads.

However, in the Colonies of Benevolence the planted avenues survived, bringing splendour and magnificence. Especially in Wortel, where the initial rows of trees were doubled and even tripled to accentuate the importance of an axis.



←
Straight planted lanes with staff
houses in Wortel (K.L.)



Series of standard family farms (Colony houses)

Standard Colony houses are not as numerous as in the flourishing period of the Colonies of Benevolence, but many of them survived. They can be considered as a primitive, rural variant of later social housing schemes. The small houses at regular distances enhance the rhythm of the landscape.

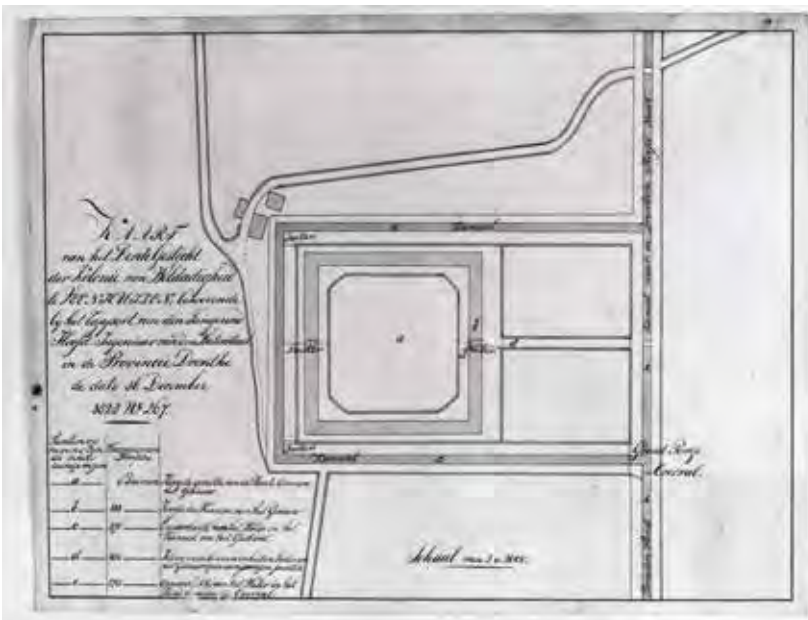
The farms were designed to offer better living conditions than the poor had been used to in their urban environments. Nowadays the farms look extremely small, but at the time they were built they were quite advanced. They had interesting hygienic features, such as a latrine and a manure pit to collect all substances that could serve as manure. Sometimes the Colony houses were used by the staff.

Series of staff houses

Next to the series of standard family farms, the homogeneous and repetitive layout of staff houses adds considerably to the image of order and regularity. The form and design not only underpin the hierarchy between colonists and staff, but also between higher and lower echelons of staff. Moralising inscriptions encourage good behaviour and enhance the image of a model environment with strict rules.

Square institutions

Finally, the large institutions in the unfree Colonies are striking nodal points with interconnected functions of living and working. Their strict symmetry with entrances and windows at exact intervals appeals order and regularity.



↑
Site plan and perspective of a Colony house in Frederiksoord, Baron de Keverberg, 1821 (A.R.B.)

↑
Plan of the Third Institution in Veenhuizen, 1828 (D.A.)

↓
A selection of Colony houses
still visible in the free Colonies
(J.v.L. and K.v.W.)



LIEUX DE MÉMOIRE

For generations of colonists and their descendants, their origin was taboo. Many people were ashamed of their link with the Colonies of Benevolence and the possible adverse impact on their social development. Therefore, until a few decades ago it was not uncommon to lie about coming from the Colonies. Job van den Have, in 1904 director of the Society of Benevolence, wrote in this connection:

‘Everywhere, throughout the Netherlands, people know of the tramp, the vagrant and the drunkard who were sent to the Colony; so it is not surprising that the general public is of the belief that these people are destined for Frederiksoord. Therefore, it appeared to us particularly desirable to avoid the word Colonies whenever possible, and to speak only of the Society of Benevolence. [...] The inhabitants working for the Society of Benevolence have also inadvertently helped to promote the

misconception. Many of them who had left the Society after having been employed as domestics, gardeners, carpenters or in other jobs, omitted to mention the name of Frederiksoord or the Society of Benevolence, and pretended to have come from Steenwijk, Vledder, Steggerda, Steenwijkerwold or Westerbeeksloot.’

At the end of the 20th century gradually a renewed, positive interest in the Colonies emerged and their reputation changed – also owing to the growing distance in time and the increasing interest in genealogy. The extensive archives, containing personal files of all the colonists, became a rich source for genealogical research and the study of social history. In 2019 the biography of Johannes van den Bosch was published by Angelie Sens, based upon new historical research.



→ One of the visitor centres in the Colonies of Benevolence, 'Visitor centre Colony 5-7' (S.)

The publication of popular books such as the bestseller *Het Pauperparadijs* (The Pauper Paradise) by Susanna Jansen, and *De proefkolonie* (The Experimental Colony), *De Bedelaarskolonie* (The Beggars' Colony) and *De Kinderkolonie* (The Children's Colony) by Will Schackmann, has been effective in largely demolishing the taboo. Embarrassment about personal descent has given way to pride about the social emancipation of families. This trend is also noticeable in Belgium, with the book *Landlopers* (Vagrants) by Toon Horsten and scientific research carried out.

The gradual decline of the importance of the Colonies of Benevolence as a place of confinement and isolation has increased their significance as a memorial site for social history. This is evidenced by the emergence of museums and visitors' centres and the adaptive re-use of buildings in which the history of the Colonies plays a central role. The layout, the architecture and the names of streets and fields also refer to the origin of the Colony landscape. Relicts like heathlands and peat lakes refer to the original landscape dating from before the Colonies. Thus, the Colonies have developed into cultural landscapes, where the story of social emancipation and their role as pioneer state become tangible.

Due to the extensive archives of the Society of Benevolence in Assen, the material held by the National Archives in The Hague, the National Archives in Beveren and Brussels, the books about life in the Colonies and the emergence of museums, recreational colonists' routes, memorial sites and colonists' days, the former Colonies of Benevolence are becoming contemporary *lieux de mémoire*.



↑
 'Het Pauperparadijs' (The Pauper Paradise) written by Susanna Jansen in 2008, is a bestseller in the Dutch language area and translated into Spanish and German.

The book 'Proefkolonie' (Experimental Colony) by Will Schackman (2006).
 The book 'Landlopers' (Vagrants) by Toon Horsten (2013).
 The novel 'Landlopersblues' (Vagrants' Blues) by Louis van Dievel (2016).

3 TWO LANDSCAPE TYPOLOGIES AND FOUR RELICT LANDSCAPE LAYERS

The Colonies were situated on wastelands of peat bog and sandy soiled plateaus.

Their historical boundaries and sometimes irregular shapes were determined by the consecutive acquisition of different areas of so-called wastelands.

The orthogonal grid and the standardisation and regimentation of the farms and institutions made the initial landscapes stand out as Colony landscapes, distinct from the surrounding cultivated areas. The organisation model was translated into a characteristic spatial structure.

The evolution created two landscape typologies, α and β , of panoptic disciplinary settlements in remote areas, for two types of target groups, expressed in four layers.

Landscape layer type α^1 (1818-1859): small-scale Colony landscape with settlements of smallholder farms

Tree-lined avenues with standardised family farms on identical plots of approximately 2,5 ha, and interspersed with supervisors' houses and plots of the same size. Directors' houses and communal buildings like schools, religious buildings and indoor workplaces were situated centrally. Where space permitted avenues would be repeated, making an orthogonal grid.

Landscape layer type α^2 (1860-1918): evolved small-scale Colony landscape with collective farms

Large collective farms and farm building complexes incorporate the land of the earlier family farms, maintaining the existing grid, but using collective colonist labour in order to improve efficiency. The smallholder farm buildings have evolved mostly into houses. Some smallholding continues but is not self-sustaining, necessitating work on the collective farms. Additional collective infrastructure for education and health care and added religious buildings.

Landscape layer type β^1 (1818-1859): large-scale Colony landscape with institutions and related collective farms

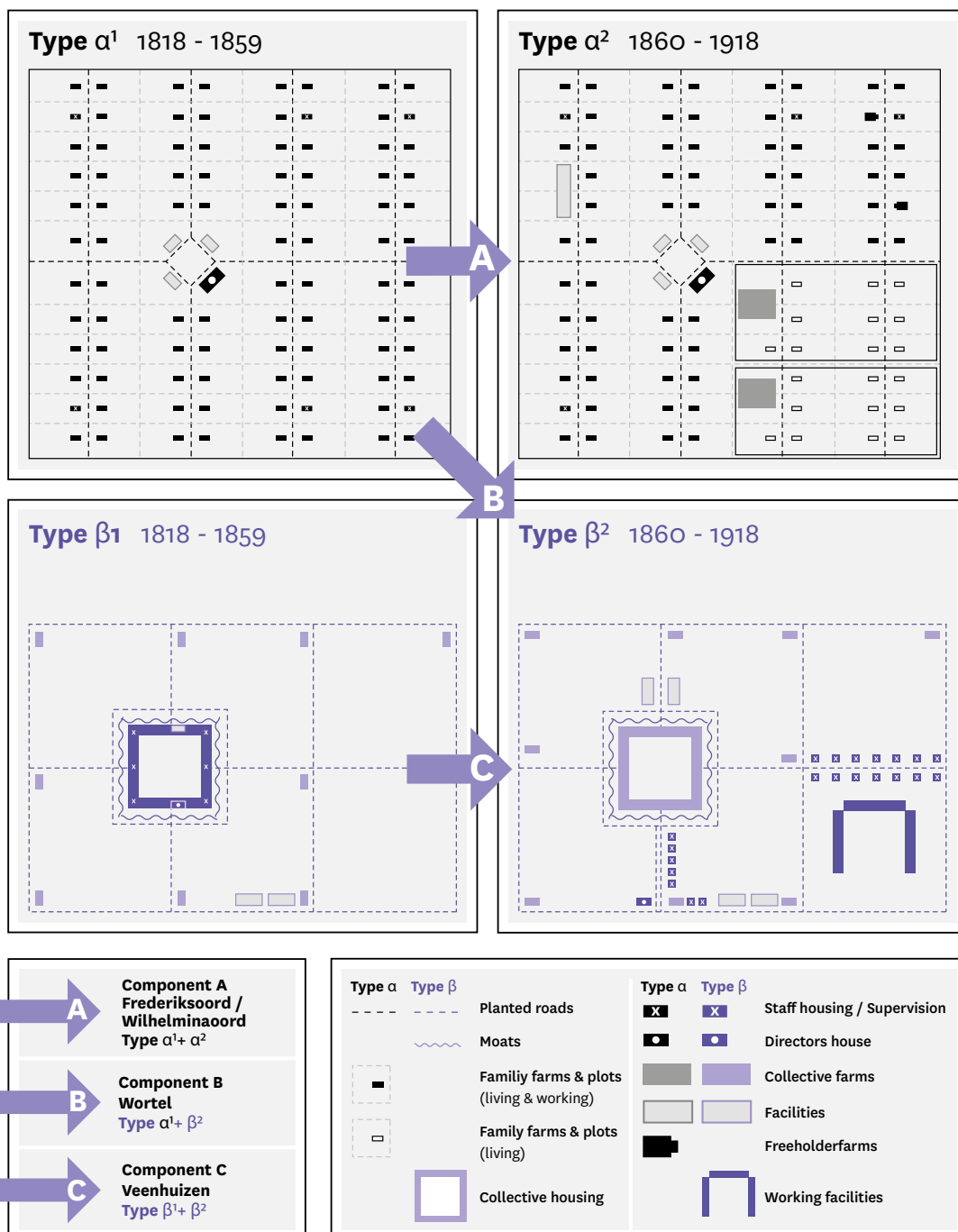
Central collective institutions with dormitories in the form of large mostly moated courtyards for groups of colonists – with four to eight large surrounding collective farms, with large standard plots and set out within an orthogonal grid of tree-lined avenues.

Landscape layer type β^2 (1860-1918): evolved large-scale hierarchical Colony landscape for groups of poor

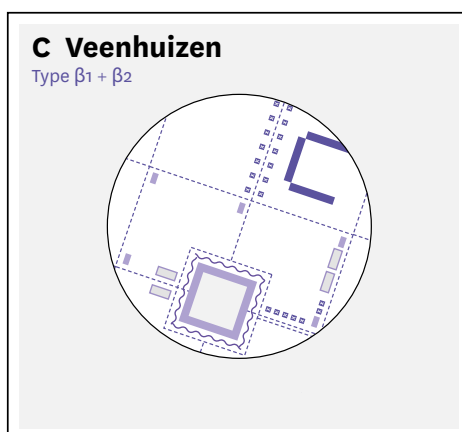
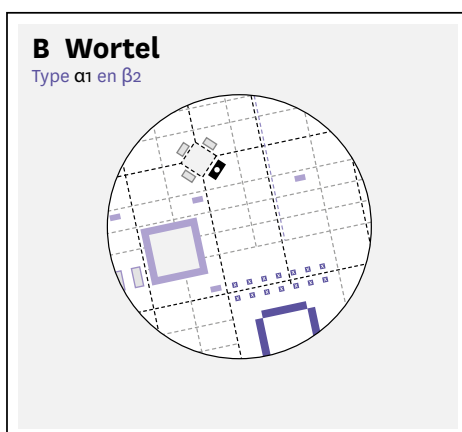
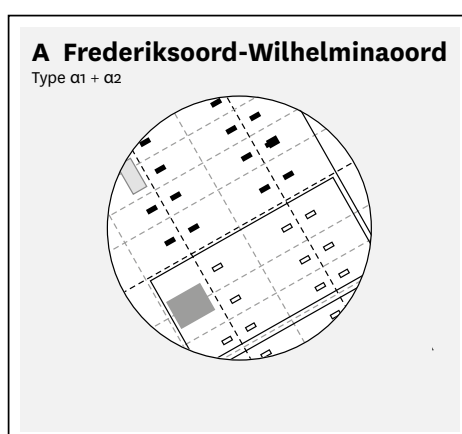
Enhanced panoptic landscape, which underlines the power of the State, by an urbanistic reorganisation of the existing Colony landscape. It strengthens the emphasis on important, symbolic axes by added plantings and placement of numerous new buildings in a coherent architectural style. Addition of large, mostly new-built, second phase institutions and extensive working facilities both in collective farms and workshops. Additional infrastructure for health care. Dispersed structured ensembles of staff houses at strategic locations within the cultivation line of the agricultural colony, varying in size, decoration and surrounding garden, according to the hierarchical status of the staff member. Cemeteries organised according to status and religion. Added elements for supervision and confinement, such as barracks.

Based on lithographs of the initial cultivation, land registry maps, representation and topographical maps a schematic visualisation of landscape layers has been made. It presents the organisational and spatial scheme as can be found in the landscape of the Colonies, covering the 'ideal' lay out of the first phase and additions made in the second phase of development. It should be noted this is an abstract model and goes without modifications made in each Colony, as a result of ownership of the land, adaptation to local geomorphology and integration of existing landscape elements.

COLONIES OF BENEVOLENCE 1818-1918 – Schematic representation



Schematic representation per component part



4 DESCRIPTION OF EACH COMPONENT

This section briefly sets out the key characteristics, history, associations and qualities of the three components which together are presented for nomination.

The outline used for each component is the same:

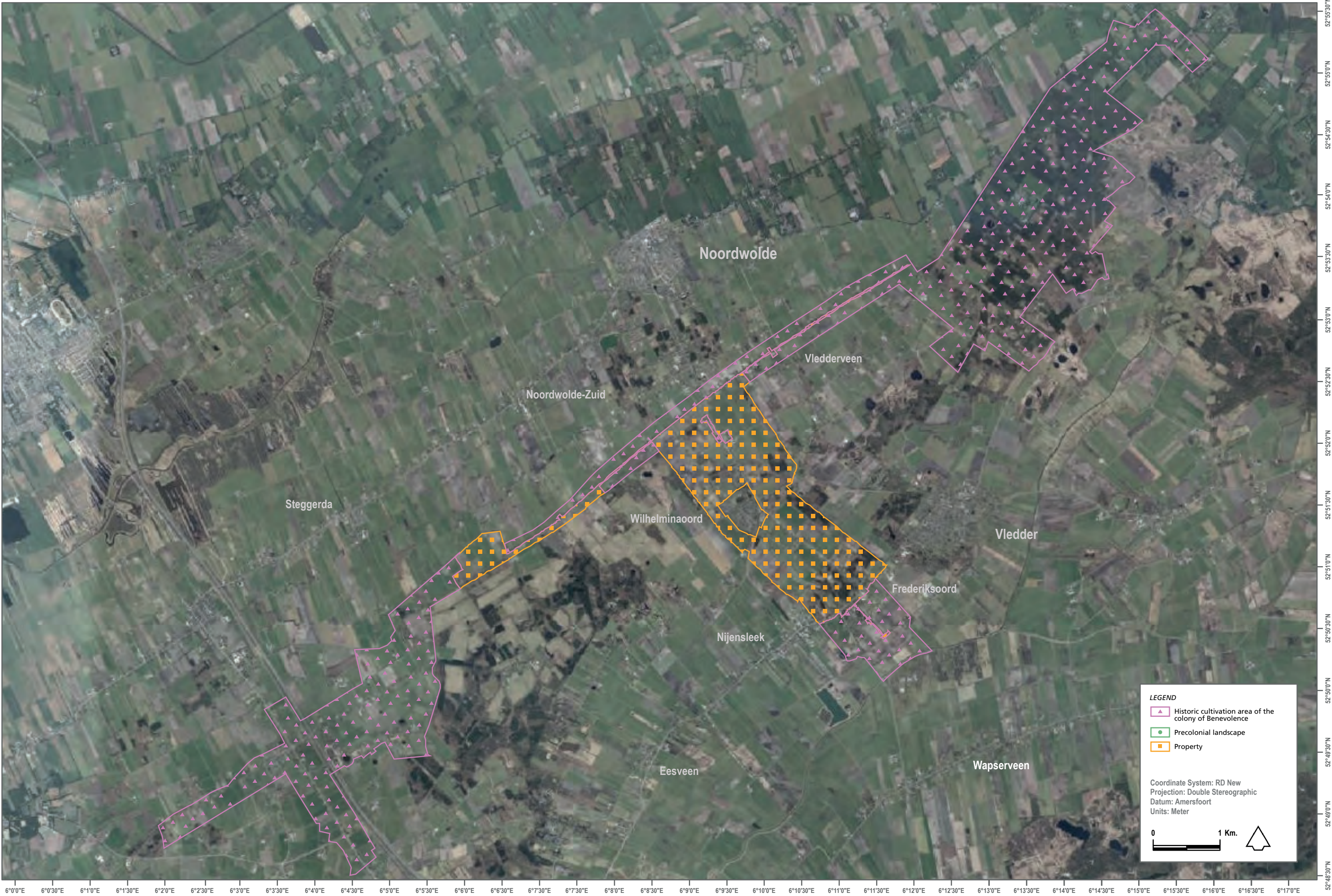
- A map of the setting
- A map of the height model
- A brief text describing the setting of of the component part, the component part itself and its qualities, focusing on the attributes which contribute to the Outstanding Universal Value

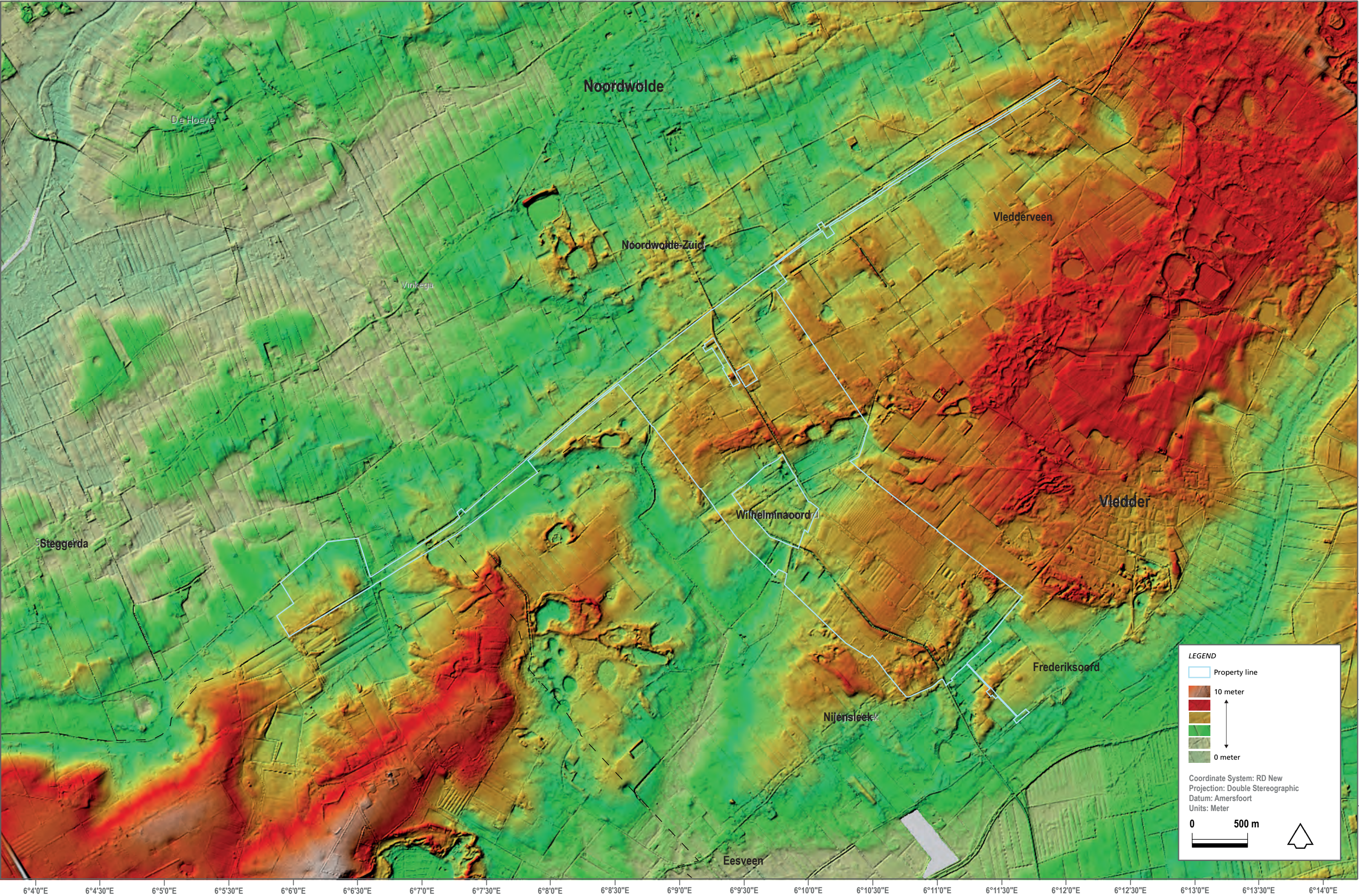
The setting includes historical landscapes which have not changed since the time of the creation of the Colonies of Benevolence as well as zones which were originally part of the historic cultivation area of the Colonies of Benevolence, but which have not been integrated in the property for reasons of integrity. However, they share some spatial characteristics and have a common history.

Frederiksoord and Wilhelminaoord (including Vierdeparten) are contiguous former Colonies, which constitute one single component. On account of their separate development, they are described in separate subdivisions, which follow the structure mentioned above.

4.1 COMPONENT PART A: FREDERIKSOORD – WILHELMINAOORD

The area of Frederiksoord-Wilhelminaoord is characterised by a spatial structure with ribbon development typical for typology α, in an agrarian landscape with small wooded areas and modern settlements. The linear pattern of roads offers space for uniform smallholder farms, placed at regular intervals. The rectilinear structure is emphasised by the tree-lined avenues. Workshops and facilities are concentrated at several intersections. Collective farms (dating from after 1864), fit into the existing structure, and make the historical stratification easy to read.





SETTING

Component part A is situated in an agricultural region.

It is surrounded by zones which were originally part of the historic cultivation area of the Colonies of Benevolence, but which have not been integrated in the property for reasons of integrity. However, they share some spatial characteristics and have a common history:

- To the north, the agricultural plots adjacent to the Vierdeparten avenue
- To the west, the former free Colony of Willemsoord
- To the east, the forest area of the former Colony zone called Boschoord and Wateren
- To the south, part of the Colony of Frederiksoord, the first experimental Colony

FREDERIKSOORD

Typology α of a free agricultural home colony.
Relict Colony landscape layers type α^1 and α^2

Structure

In Frederiksoord, the structure of the free Colony resulted in a landscape with long, mostly parallel ribbons, a small-scale character, expanded and adjusted in accordance with the existing structure of the Westerbeeksloot estate. Within the original pattern with scattered buildings, the crossroads and cultivation axes were used for the realisation of facilities and workshops.

In the current spatial structure much of the former Colony structure remains preserved. The rectilinear road pattern, reinforced by the avenue planting consisting of a variety of trees, the axes with



→
Aerial photograph of the
orthogonal structure of the
landscape in Frederiksoord
(M.D.)

uniform small buildings at regular intervals and the small agricultural plots determine the landscape characteristics of present-day Frederiksoord.

The road structure demonstrates a clearly recognisable hierarchy, only in some places disturbed by traffic management interventions. Main roads are continuous, while cross-connections are sometimes staggered in relation to each other. The distinction between main roads and secondary roads is emphasised by the presence of paved roads and unpaved (dirt) roads, like the Hooiweg and the Oranjelaan.

The Dutch policy concerning heritage development (the so-called Belvedere Programme 1999-2009: ‘conservation through development’) includes a project for this area, i.e. the construction of new energy-efficient, sustainable Colony houses in places where the old ones have disappeared. A total of 62 such houses will be built by the Society of Benevolence, with a leasehold.

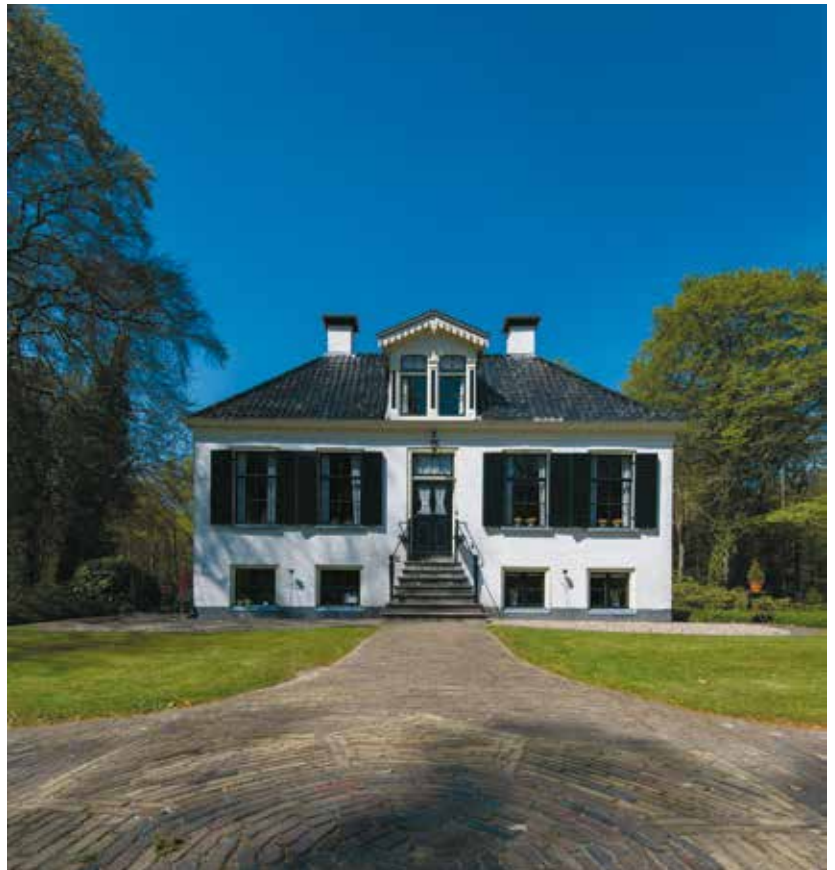
Representative buildings and planting

This Colony retains about half the amount of its original Colony houses. On the Majoor van Swietenlaan and the Koningin Wilhelminalaan, small Colony houses are found which date back to the early days, but were restored and/or adapted to meet the requirements of modern comfort, as the original ones lacked running water and electricity.

The core of the Colony is Huis Westerbeek, with the surrounding grounds of the estate.

In this mansion, which served as the house of the first director, the Society of Benevolence has its offices. Its presence marks the origins of the Colonies of Benevolence and the continuity over 200 years.

In the immediate vicinity, a number of public facilities are to be found, realised either in support of the Society itself or for the education or the employment of the poor. In 1770, Hotel Frederiksoord was established as a guest house by Nicolaas van Heloma, the then owner



of the Westerbeeksloot estate. After the acquisition by the Society of Benevolence, it became the permanent meeting venue for its administrators. Next to the hotel, there is a prominent post office with an integrated house, added in the second phase.

Around 1910-1915 a large doctor's house was built, commissioned by the Society of Benevolence. The building is characteristic of the level of facilities within the Society.

On the other side of the road there are two Colony houses which served to accommodate staff (municipal controllers).

At the Koningin Wilhelminalaan, the forestry school, established in 1887, is to be found. This building is now let for residential purposes. The former institutor's house is situated opposite.

↑
House Westerbeek (approx. 1780): former residence of Johannes van den Bosch. Currently the office of the Society of Benevolence is established here (J.v.L.)

The former carpentry shop was previously in use as a carpentry and maintenance workshop of the Society of Benevolence. Until very recently (May 2019), the building housed a museum. In future it will be given a new function.

The museum was closed and replaced by a brand-new presentation in an existing building situated just outside the property, on the grounds of the former horticultural school.

An organic food shop is located in the former steam tram depot on the Koningin Wilhelminalaan.

The farm Koning Willem III, dating from 1865, is situated on the main road from Frederiksoord to Wilhelminaoord. The farm is leased as a dairy farm and is still in operation. It is a model for the policy of upscaling applied from 1859, and was always considered exemplary for the operational management of the Society.



↗
Farm King William III in
Frederiksoord (A.B.)

→
Colony house in Frederiksoord
(K.v.W.)

WILHELMINAOORD

Typology α of a free agricultural home Colony
Relict Colony landscape layers type α^1 and α^2 .

Structure

The spatial structure of Wilhelminaoord consists of parallel ribbons, in part a continuation of those in Frederiksoord. Both Colonies merge via the Koningin Wilhelminalaan and the avenue parallel to it, and are also connected by the Westerbeeksloot barge canal, which was originally planned as a waterway. At the intersection with the Koningin Wilhelminalaan, the Westerbeeksloot makes a right-angle left turn, requiring the construction of a turning basin to enable transport ships (keel barges) to turn. This turning basin is still visible. The Westerbeeksloot's main function these days is irrigation; due to low water levels, it can no longer accommodate shipping. Along both avenues the same pattern of ribbon development recurs, though with slightly larger plots and, consequently, greater intervals (120 metres). Facilities, concentrated mainly on Koningin Wilhelminalaan, are complementary to those of Frederiksoord.

From 1859, as in Frederiksoord, larger collective farms – In Wilhelminaoord this is the farm princess Marianne – were introduced within the grid.

The pattern of the avenues has remained intact, with many older trees. Despite the fact that all the Colony houses on the eastern parallel avenue, the Hooiweg, disappeared mid-20th century, about 56% of the family farm buildings remain, slightly more than in Frederiksoord.

Representative buildings and planting

Some of the facilities in Wilhelminaoord differed from those in Frederiksoord, for example the homes for the elderly Rustoord I and Rustoord II. Rustoord I contains the first government-initiated homes for the elderly in the Netherlands (1893). In 1975, the building was extensively restored and divided into four houses,

which at present are let. In 1904 Rustoord II, a larger-scale set-up, was realised. After the construction of a new home for the elderly, the building was converted into Buitencentrum Wilhelminaoord, property of the municipality of The Hague, designated for outdoor and nature education at primary schools.

The simple little brick church with rectory, on the border of Frederiksoord and Wilhelminaoord, was built in 1851 to meet the requirement of mandatory church attendance in the Colonies. Until 2009 it was in use by the Dutch Reformed church. These days it is used for festive and cultural events. Until the dissolution of the church function, the 1912 rectory adjacent to the church was the vicar's home. The planting near the small 'Koloniekerk' (church) and the rectory includes monumental beeches and common limes, which have been there from the construction in 1851.

The former school with schoolmaster's house in Wilhelminaoord, built in 1821, is a double house now. The basketry/weaving mill/forge on the Wilhelminalaan offered the required alternative employment to colonists who were unfit for hard agricultural labour. The building now offers adapted housing facilities for people with an autism spectrum disorder.

↓
As from 1818, colonists' children over 6 years old had to attend school. School dating from 1821 in Wilhelminaoord (J.v.L.)





→
The general cemetery in
Wilhelminaoord (A.B.)



→
Farm Princess Marianne in
Wilhelminaoord (A.B.)



The general cemetery on the Oranjelaan is simple, with rectangular plots. Most of the gravestones date from the 19th and early 20th centuries. The 1819 cast-iron gravestone of Daniella Elisabeth van Oosterhoudt, mother-in-law of Johannes van den Bosch, is to be found there. At this cemetery the large trunk of a so-called Apostle tree is to be found, a multiple tree planting consisting of twelve beeches in one planting hole. The tree has been there from the beginnings of the Colony. It was destroyed by a storm in June 2019; a new one was planted recently.

Hoeve Prinses Marianne, dating from 1913, is still in operation as a farm. It replaced an earlier farm of period 2, which was destroyed by fire. Adjacent to the farm a hexagonal wooden thatched haystack is situated, built around 1865. In 2013 a cubicle barn was added to Hoeve Prinses Marianne. The barn was carefully integrated into the landscape and is exemplary for appropriate renovation in line with heritage values.

A second large farm, a so-called ‘freeholder farm’ where a promoted former colonist was in charge of running the farm business, is situated at the Van Namen van Eemneslaan and dates back to the beginning of the 20th century.

VIERDEPARTEN

Typology α of a free agricultural home Colony
Relict Colony landscape layers type α¹ and α².

The elongated shape of Vierdeparten forms a ribbon of almost ten kilometres long, consisting of the main road and a parallel channel, with family farms on either side, connecting the Colony of Wilhelminaoord (within the property) with Boschoord in the north-east and Willemsoord at the most southwestern point (outside the property). The avenue itself is positioned slightly elevated in the landscape, because it was constructed on the soil that accumulated during the excavation of the canal.



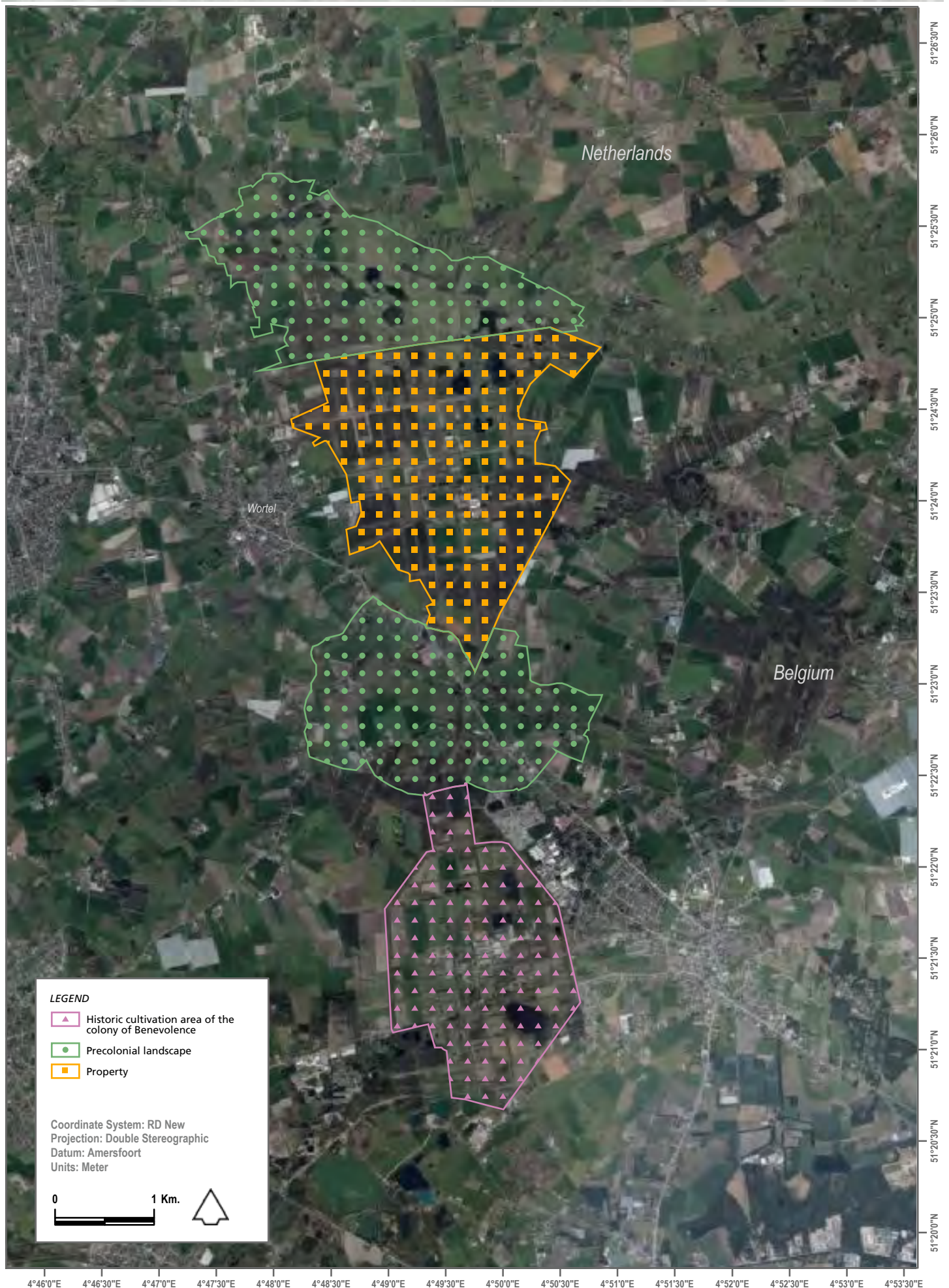
The structure of the landscape and the avenue planting still exist, but only a few Colony houses of the Society of Benevolence were preserved. In the western part near the Leemweg the schoolmaster's house is to be found. The number of family farms close to Wilhelminaoord and eastwards provides a more complete picture, and once the pattern becomes apparent, the avenue demonstrates the concept of the theoretically never-ending Colony avenue.

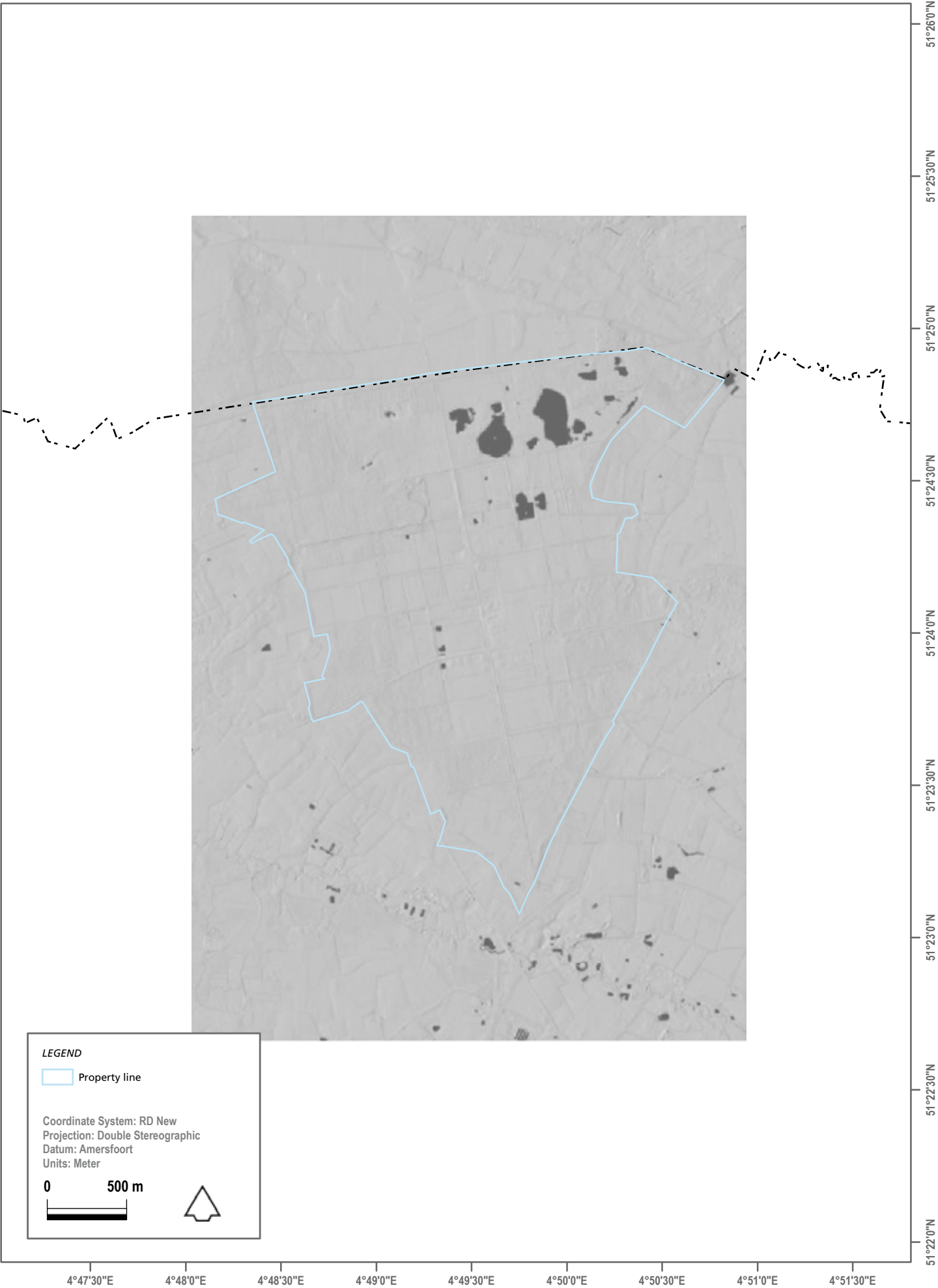
The avenue planting of common oaks along the avenue of Vierdeparten, which was constructed in 1820, dates from the period 1880-1900, and is a replacement of earlier planting.

↑
Straight planted lanes in the Parten (O.)

↑
Former postoffice in Frederiksoord (J.v.L.)

M2.3 SETTING
COMPONENT PART B: WORTEL
1:50.000





↓
Vista of the alternating open and closed spaces in the landscape (J.v.L.)

↓
Orthogonal structure with single and double row planted avenues. (W.V.)

↓
The typical outline of the Colony landscape with straight planted avenues (S.)



4.2 COMPONENT PART B: WORTEL

Wortel Colony is a rural area with agriculture and nature. The clear orthogonal structure is marked by striking avenues and centrally located buildings.

TPOLOGY

Typology α and β of a hybrid Colony, an unfree Colony developed within the grid of a free Colony. Relict Colony landscape layers type α^1 and β^2 .

SETTING

Wortel Colony is in sharp contrast with the surrounding landscape as it was 200 years ago.

To the north, the Component part borders Dutch territory and the large historical landscape of the Castelreesche Heide (heathland, which existed at the founding of the Colony).

To the south, the Component part borders the natural area of the river Mark (partly Natura 2000 area) and the unfree Colony of Merksplas.

SPATIAL PATTERN

Wortel Colony still shows the cultivation structure of the first period as an agricultural colony, with a central north-south axis that branches onto the Langenberg, and parallel transverse links with a fixed size. The set-up is similar to that of the Colony of Willemsoord (in the setting of Component part A). Within this complex of main avenues the landscape is divided into narrow uniform plots, separated by a system of ditches and paths. The plots are the remains of the farmyards from the days of the free Colony. None of the Colony houses themselves were preserved.

The early pattern of family farms disappeared during the period of abandonment, although the system of ditches and drains is still explicitly present, especially in areas that became woodlands rather than fields after 1870.

↓
Orthogonal structure of the
landscape (J.v.L.)

↓
The central crossroads in Wortel
(J.v.L.)

↓
After 1870 the free Colony of
Wortel developed into an unfree
Colony with a central vagrants'
institution (J.v.L.)

In the first period, the central facilities were situated at the central crossroads, which is shown in the Colony's original lay-out. Some of the current buildings still show a characteristic 45° positioning, but they date from the period after the transformation of the site into the State Colony of Benevolence.

The landscape contains large open plots of grasslands and farmlands, alternating with closed structures of forests and shrubbery. The majority of the forests consist of pine groves, sometimes with a gradual shift to deciduous woods. Locally there are still some heath relicts and a few fens dating back to the former fen systems. The largest fen in the north was transformed into a pond for swimming and fishing, 'het Bootjesven', with the appropriate infrastructure.

The avenues are arranged in an impressive grid-like pattern, hierarchically structured in single and double avenues (with a double row of trees) with mainly common oaks, but also northern red oak trees and beeches. The drainage and dewatering system also displays an orthogonal structure. There are bat colonies in the avenue planting.

The actual cadastral structure of the area reflects the structure of the free Colony. It has not been changed since.

REPRESENTATIVE BUILDINGS AND PLANTING

The main building of the agricultural colony, the late 19th century former institution building with central offices, workshops and dormitories, is situated along the central axis. The building programme was in line with the adjacent Merksplas Colony (in the setting), but more simple in style. The complex is arranged around a central courtyard. Since the closure of the accommodation for beggars in 1993 as a result of the abolition of the Vagrancy Act, it has served exclusively as a penitentiary. In the course of the years most of the brick buildings were painted in white.





The farm in Wortel was partly adapted for re-use as an experience farm for children and young people (J.v.L.)



There are 18 staff houses in Wortel. As a result of long-term leases, these are now once again inhabited by families (J.v.L.)



The vagrants were buried anonymously, only accompanied by their number (J.v.L.)

As a result of war damage and fire some parts have disappeared, such as the chapel and the field hospital, and were partly replaced by new buildings. Recently a new prison complex was added to the existing structure. The whole area is enclosed by high fencing, in compliance with current safety regulations for penitentiary institutions.

Centrally located at the crossroads are the former festivity hall, popularly called 'casino', and a double employees' house. These buildings date from the phase in which the State renewed the set-up (1870). The casino was first a barracks and later a festivity hall for the employees of the Colony. In the employees' house the Widar organisation now runs a home for adults with a moderate to severe mental handicap. The residents are active on the nearby farm and in the casino, which functions as a festivity hall and a summer café.

A little bit further on the farm of the Colony from the same construction period, late 19th century, is to be found. It consists of three interconnected wings in a U-shape, with the east wing missing. Originally, the living quarters of the farm were situated at the crossroads, but after having been damaged during World War II it was rebuilt as a south wing of the existing farm complex. These are brick buildings, predominantly with gable roofs, sometimes overlapping; most of them are painted white or limed yellow.

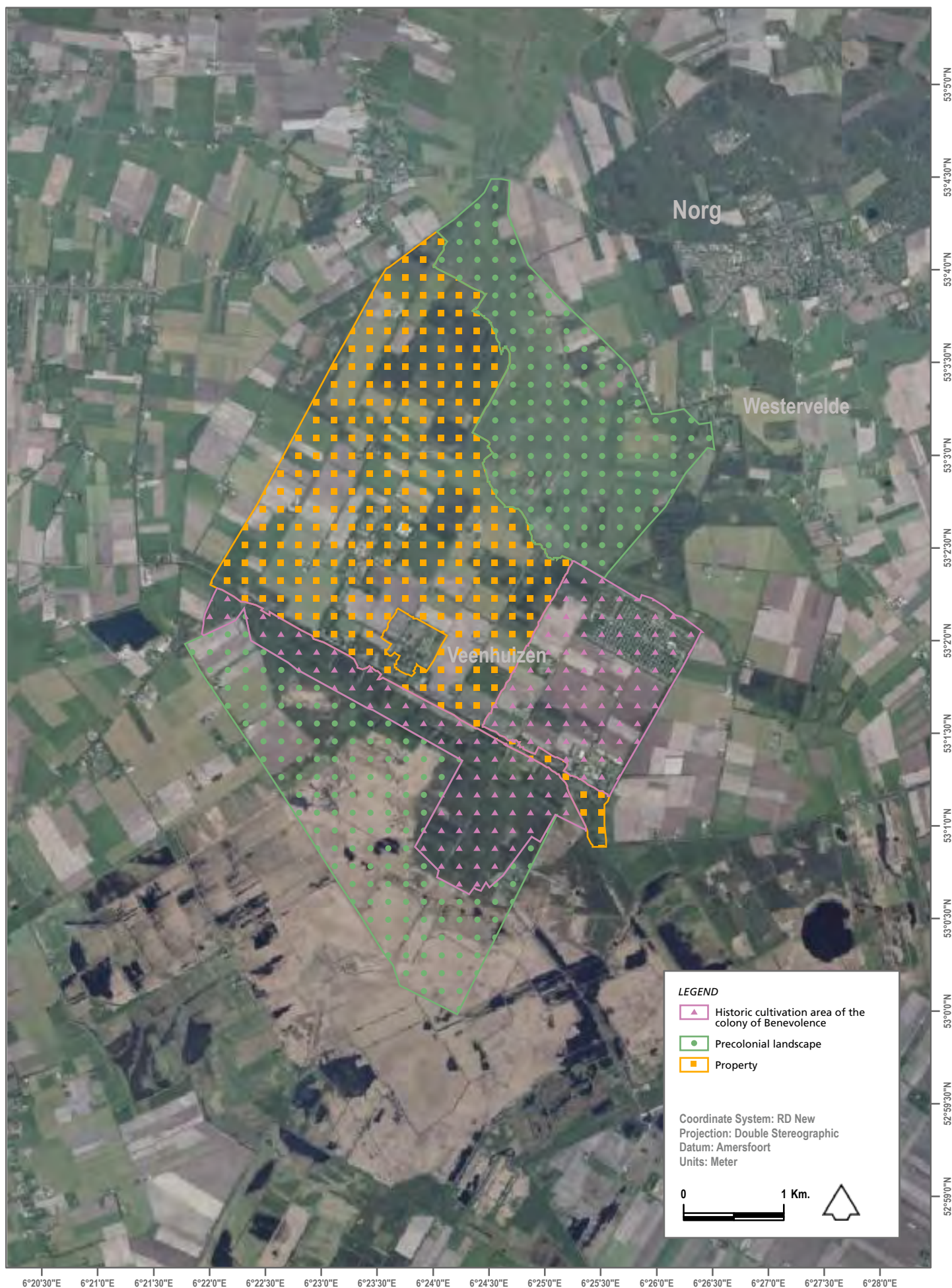
Agricultural classes for children are organised in the farm and there is an educational nature centre run by Natuurpunt, a Flemish environmental organisation.

The staff houses are concentrated on either side of the north-south main axis and on the western part of a nearby east-west axis. These are double houses with a hedged utility garden, symmetrically positioned. The (larger) houses for senior personnel were scattered along the north-south main axis. The house of the head of staff remained preserved; the chaplain's house made way for a post-war replacement construction.

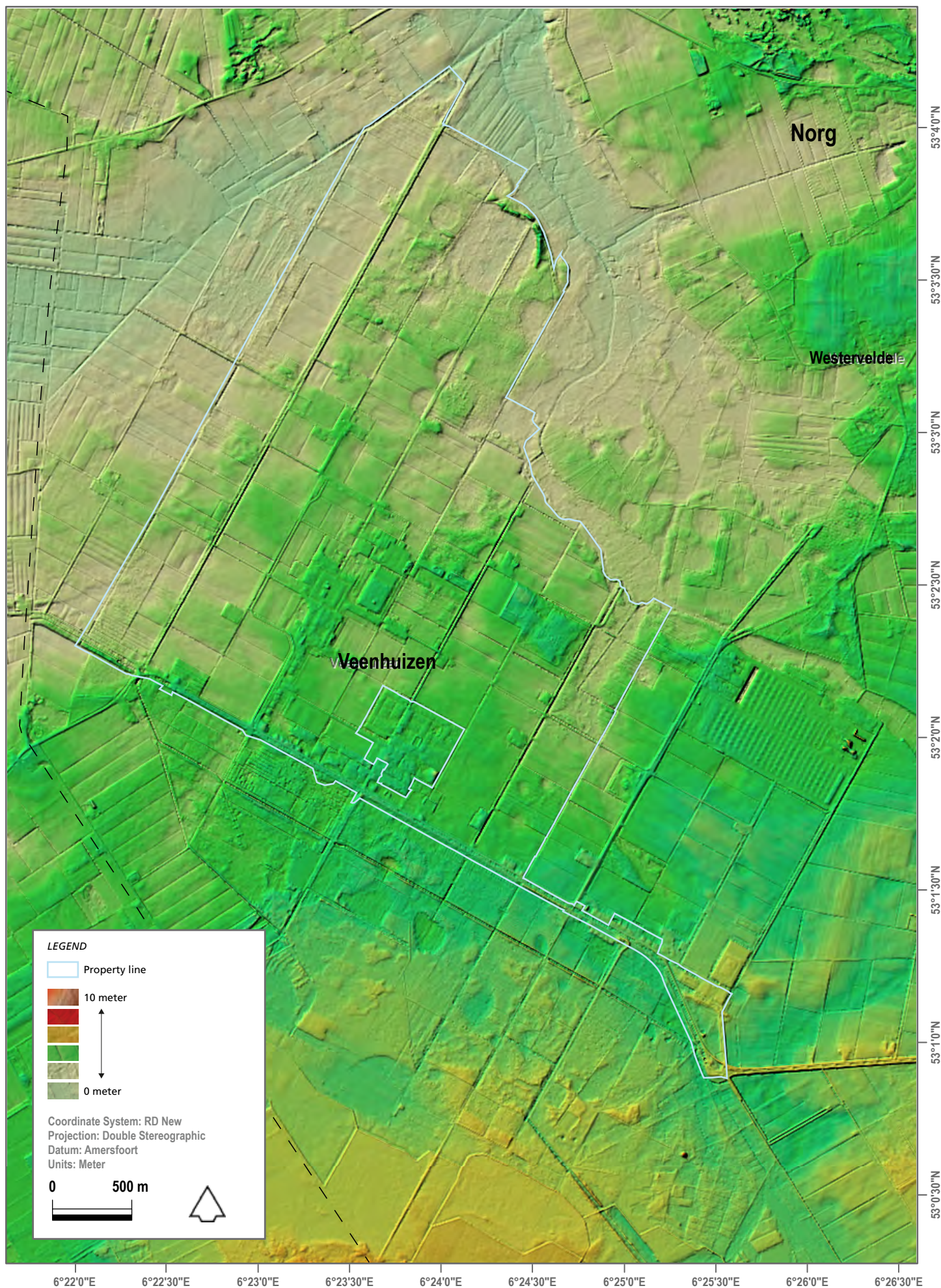
The simple cemetery is located on one of the northern avenues.

M2.5 SETTINGS
COMPONENT PART C: VEENHUIZEN

1:50.000



M2.6 HEIGHT MODEL
COMPONENT PART C: VEENHUIZEN
1:50.000



4.3 COMPONENT PART C: VEENHUIZEN

The area of Veenhuizen is characterised by a large-scale orthogonal structure on peat soil, with a striking water structure. It is a mainly agricultural landscape with sprawled farms and concentration of buildings next to former institutions (now museum and penal institutions).

TPOLOGY

Typology β of an unfree Colony.
Colony landscape layers type β^1 and β^2 .

SETTING

Component part C is situated in a remote area, dominated by agriculture and nature reserves.

On the south and east side, Component part C is surrounded by forest and agricultural plots which were part of the historic cultivation area of the Colony. The forest borders the National Park area of Fochteloërveen, a Natura 2000 area, where the precolonial wet heath and peatlands are being preserved. In the north, the valley of the small river Slokkert, with hayfields as part of the surrounding 'esdorpen-landscape', marks the contrast with the Colony landscape.

STRUCTURE

This Colony is the largest of all the Colonies of Benevolence, and initially accommodated orphans and vagrants.

Cultivation was carried out according to a rational pattern, typical for peat cultivations. The basis is formed by a straight main canal, the Kolonievaart, with six 'wijken', smaller perpendicular



←
The Fochteloërveen is an active raised bog. This is more or less what the landscape looked like at the location where the Colony was founded (J.v.L.)

↓
Second Institution in Veenhuizen
(J.v.L.)

↙
Lock in the fifth 'wijk' (O.O.)

↘
Construction of Lock III west of
the sixth 'wijk' in Veenhuizen in
1878 (R.A.)



canals, at intervals of 750 metres. Halfway that distance, parallel to the 'wijken', a polder ditch is situated. At exactly 375 metres from the outer 'wijken' the external borders of the Colony were drawn. The grid, with multiples of 375 metres, forms the basis of the land use. In conjunction with the waterways, a rectilinear road pattern was created in this way. To accommodate road and water traffic, several bridges and a number of locks were constructed, some of which have been preserved.

Within the orthogonal grid, three institutions were placed with accompanying collective farms and workshops. Central in the area, next to the entrance axis, a cluster of religious buildings dating back to the first period is to be found.

The orthogonal basic structure and the corresponding block-shaped parcelling have withstood time, and the avenue planting emphasises the spatial pattern. The major part of the avenue planting dates from the period between 1859 and 1920.

The waterways have lost their trade and traffic function. Of the six 'wijken' only the 'Sixth Wijk' still exists in its entirety, and the part of the 'Fifth Wijk' between the Kolonievvaart canal and the Second Institution, with a cross-connection to the former industrial area. The other 'wijken' were largely filled in and subsequently opened up again. Only the 'Second Wijk' was virtually completely filled in.

In the second period, subsequent developments conformed to this set-up and enhanced it. Additional ancillary buildings have been added onto the grid. The contiguous buildings embody the principle of a panoptic landscape: the imposition of a network of authority and power structures in accordance with a closed norms system. Father and son J.F. and W.C. Metzelaar made clever use of the existing structure, and W.C. Metzelaar considerably expanded the clustering of functions around the institutions and the Reformed church. He also used the positioning of staff housing to reinforce the rectilinear axes.



← Aerial photograph of the orthogonal structure of the landscape with the Second Institution, Esserheem and the hospital complex (M.D.)

The central part of the territory is still characterised by agricultural land use, mainly pastures for cows and horses and fodder crops. The high degree of openness is occasionally interrupted by avenue planting and forest plots. The latter are located mainly at the northern and southern edges of the area (south of the canal), where they create a transition to the nature reserves of the valley of De Slokkert and the raised bog of Fochteloërveen. There are a few timber production forests.

REPRESENTATIVE BUILDINGS AND PLANTING

Of the 24 institution farms about 11 are left, almost all of them built after 1890 as replacements of earlier farms. Farm 'De Jachtweide' dates back to before 1822 and was incorporated in the initial structure.

The centrally located Second Institution is the only remaining example of the institutions as they were initially built by the Society of Benevolence. Since 2005 it houses a museum. The enormous square-shaped building (145 × 145 metres) from 1823 is a single-storey building with a double gable roof surrounded by its original moat. The east side of the rectangle has been demolished. The characteristic construction features an inner and an outer shell, separated by an

↓
Former Jewish synagogue (G.N.)

↓
Dutch Reformed church dating
from 1825 (O.)



intermediate wall. In the outer shell, 102 one-room residences were provided for workers' families. The inner shell, facing the large courtyard, provided space for twelve children's rooms. There were entrances at two sides, with space on either side for supervising officials. The building still has its original clock and bell, which were central elements in the day-to-day scheme. Located adjacent to the east side is the institution building added in 1895-1899, now Esserheem prison, with new extensions at the rear.

South of the institution, early central facilities are situated along the main canal (Kolonievaart): the octagonal Dutch Reformed church dating from 1825, the large Roman Catholic church (1893) and the synagogue (1839). The interior and exterior of the Dutch Reformed church are untouched. In 1894 the synagogue was converted into an office, although the main design of its exterior has been preserved.

In the same zone, different clusters of ancillary buildings testify to the enhancement of the Colony in the second period. South of the institution an important workshop cluster is situated, with a slaughterhouse (now a tourist office), the sawmill, a wood workshop with woodsheds and the former power station – fuelled by turf – with its historical machinery. The latter was fully restored to its original condition. A modern fire station has been added, carefully placed within the grid.

On the north side of the rectangle of the former Second Institution, after the 'wijk' had been filled in, a wide avenue arose lined with high trees and houses designed by architect W.C. Metzelaar. These include the former homes of the pharmacist and the doctor of the hospital situated behind. The houses and the hospital now accommodate hotel Bitter en Zoet. The former quarantine building has become a hernia clinic. The ice dome has also been preserved.

Next to these, there are different series of staff houses and a military barracks.



← Former staff houses of the doctor ('Toewijding') and the pharmacist ('Bitter en Zoet') (K.v.W.)

↓ All the buildings in the Maallust complex originally had a function in the processing of agricultural products. Currently brewery 'Maallust' is established in this former grain mill (J.v.L.)

Alongside the wijk to the Kolonievart, the former school, different staff houses, a farm and the former hotel are to be found.

Next to the Kolonievart, a conglomerate of production buildings is to be found, including the grain mill Maallust, which now accommodates a microbrewery. The grain silo contains a climbing tower, and in 2010 the historic dairy factory became a cheese dairy. A special grain drying facility, unique in its kind, is situated around the partly preserved grain mill. The building has been placed on supports to protect the grain from wet soil.

Alongside the Kolonievart and the main access road to the Colony, more series of staff houses are to be found, together with the director's house, a winged pavilion with a coach house. It was erected in 1859 to mark the takeover of the Colony by the State. In the garden a red beech was planted, and at the other side of the canal are the remains of a garden (so-called overtuinen), arranged to offer a vista from the house.

Near the remains of the former Third Institution, demolished in 1925, a small and somewhat remote group of houses and farms is located around the former cotton mill Het Stoom, dating from 1839. This was the first steam-powered factory in Drenthe,



currently a house and B & B. Located nearby are also the cotton mill director's house and the farm Stoomhoeve. The farm 'De Jachtweide' from 1723 is also to be found here. This is the last remnant of the former hamlet of Veenhuizen. It was given the function of first farm of the Third Institution. In the landscape, the outlines of the previous institution can be seen, marked by flowers.

In the cluster around the First Institution, there are no buildings left from the first phase. In 2005 the workhouse (dating back to 1885-1889) was converted into a cluster of offices for the Department of Justice. Apart from a few blocks of staff houses by architect

↓
In the summer the contours of the former Third Institution in Veenhuizen can be once again perceived through the sowing of flowers (M.D.)

↓
Cotton mill near the former Third Institution (J.v.L.)

↓
The cemetery in Veenhuizen is also known as 'The Fourth Institution' (J.v.L.)



Willem C. Metzelaar, few other functions are represented here. There is a row of houses along the canal with a (former) school building.

The Sterrebos, a wooded area with a star-shaped pattern of paths, dates from the time of increased afforestation owing to a shortage of manpower for agriculture. Located nearby is the general cemetery – also known under the illustrious name of “The Fourth Institution” – with different sections for colonists, employees and prisoners. Until 1875, colonists were buried anonymously. Between 1823 and 1875 alone, more than 11,000 people were buried here. Protestants and Catholics were buried separately. A bit further north the remnants of the Jewish cemetery are to be found, with one remaining gravestone. Also worth mentioning are the graves of Belgian war refugees (1914-1918).

2.b

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

I CONTEXT

STRIKING POVERTY

The era was marked by striking poverty all over Europe. Of course, the shift in dominance in trade after the English-Dutch and the Napoleonic wars, and the very high war debts, had a huge impact on the economy in the Netherlands.

In 1798 the Dutch East India Company was dissolved, and colonial territories and access to the Baltic Sea, the main supply route for grain, were lost due to the introduction of Napoleon's Continental System in 1806. As a result, domestic and foreign trade came to a virtual standstill. This also caused the Netherlands to lose its privileged position as a central point in the world grain trade, which had an immediate impact on grain prices in the country itself. The price increase could not be offset by a rapid conversion of native production, as Dutch agriculture had gradually been specialising in dairy produce and steer fattening, precisely because the farmers could not compete against the cheap imported grain.



←
'Oude bedelaar, de arme gryzaart' (Old beggar, the poor greybeard), Noach van der Meer, 1777 (R.A.)

But the underlying mechanisms of social transformation that were responsible for the rapidly increasing impoverishment from the second half of the 18th century onwards were pan-European – not only related to a post-war situation. Agricultural progress and farm consolidation (upscaling), coupled with mercantile capitalism, drove small landowners and smallholders to move from the countryside and make the shift from subsistence agriculture to wage labour.

The enormous population growth created additional pressure on food prices in the face of stagnating wages, and hence also on existing welfare systems. The Industrial Revolution, which had already started at that time – particularly in the UK and the Southern Netherlands – initially provided additional employment for the impoverished masses, but at the same time destroyed existing rural systems of agriculture combined with cottage industries (such as textiles).



→

Beggar is given a handout by a lady, Pieter Bartholomeuz Barbiers, early 19th century (R.A.)

Finally, the utter impoverishment of the lower classes can be deduced from the growing size and intensity of migration movements. Leaving one's birthplace in the hope of finding means of subsistence elsewhere was by no means a new phenomenon in European history. Since the late Middle Ages, the number of needy people looking for work had increased steadily. In the course of the 18th century, however, physical mobility became the fate of large masses whose last resources had been exhausted. Migration could take three different forms: mere seasonal movement, with the pauper leaving home only for a few months a year; temporary displacement, meaning that he left for several years, after which he returned to his home parish; permanent emigration, usually from the countryside to the city, but also to foreign countries and even to different continents.

In addition to this widespread poverty, even more pressure was put on the system in 1816, when Europe experienced the worst famine of the 19th century.

The year 1816 came to be known as the "year without summer", caused by the largest volcanic eruption in history, of Mount Tambora in Indonesia, in 1815. Ash in the atmosphere caused drops in global temperatures and worldwide crop failures. The available food became unaffordable, as crops were decimated.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT – KEY IDEAS

As a cultural and philosophical movement in Europe, the Enlightenment more or less coincided with the 18th century. It emerged in response to dogmatic belief in authority, and advocated the use of reason based on fact-finding exercises. Therefore, the Enlightenment also represented the promotion of science and intellectual exchange. Progress through scientific understanding of nature and technology was a widespread objective.

Before the Enlightenment, it was assumed that man automatically tended towards evil and depended on God and the crown. Enlightened thinkers, however, saw man as inherently good, autonomous and independent. Usefulness, the dignity of man and his pursuit of happiness in this life (not in the hereafter) formed the basic principle of ethics. The thinkers sought a rational and universal morality which could be applied to the actions of all people on earth and independent of religion.

The belief in the malleability of man was an anchor point for the establishment of the Colonies of Benevolence. The Colonies experiment is based on the idea that every human can change, provided he receives proper training and guidance.

But above all, the Colonies of Benevolence were in line with the dominant 19th century liberal vision, whereby every citizen was supposed to be able to take care of himself.

The concept was legitimised on the basis of that ideal, and aimed to launch a civilisation offensive, based on the underlying moral conviction that it was desirable to make poor people and unfertile land productive, and to implicate them in a modern society.¹

This fitted in perfectly with the words of John Locke in the 17th century.

*“God gave the World to Men in Common...
but it cannot be supposed he meant it should
always remain common and uncultivated.
He gave it to the use of the Industrious and
Rational and Labour was to be his Title to it”*

There is an unmistakable resemblance to the legitimisation also applied to overseas colonisation – both financial (the transformation of natural landscape and the introduction into a capitalist production system) and ethical (the ‘civilising’ – converting into citizens who fit within a modern society).²

The Colonies of Benevolence indisputably fit in with the optimism of progress and the development perspective, which at the beginning of the 19th century was considered to be ‘progressive’. Along these lines they continued to build on the ideas of Locke and Smith and other Enlightened thinkers.

EXISTING SCHEMES FOR POVERTY REDUCTION

Despite the progressive ideas of the Enlightenment, models for poverty relief in the 18th and 19th centuries were mostly continuations of the ideas which Juan Luis Vives had disseminated as early as 1526: decent poor should be taken care of, 'idle' poor should be put to work. Poverty relief of that era reflected this theoretical opinion. In reality, the method was essentially to deter and consequently prevent too many people asking for assistance. In fact, during these eras poverty relief remained an important control strategy for the elites. Providing poverty relief was not just a way of coping with a social problem, but also a way of controlling risks to labour supply and of preserving the peace in society.

Phenomena directly related to poverty, such as begging and vagrancy, were largely criminalised throughout the western world. By the end of the 18th century, large countries such as France, the UK and Prussia had legal frameworks in place prohibiting begging and vagrancy and imposing the employment of 'idle poor'.

During the second half of the 18th century, urban disciplinary institutions, hôpitaux généraux, workhouses, were created across Europe. They were in part houses of correction, in part places of centralised craft production with the aim of separating criminalised groups from society, while disciplining them through strict precepts of work and morality.

However, no national poverty relief systems were put in place: relief was still organised and financed locally, by a wide range of different organisations such as traditional religious charities, but also by municipalities.

The policy on poverty only fundamentally changed under pressure from circumstances, especially when ideas could be translated into economic or political terms, i.e. whenever the existing trinity of charity-control-labour regulation coincided with the real

or perceived interests of employers and authorities. As for private charity, the elite's mercy was limited almost exclusively to the 'decent poor': children, the elderly, the sick and the handicapped. They rarely recognised the misery of wage earners, or attributed it to laziness and other personal shortcomings.

In this sense it is not surprising that the Colonies of Benevolence originated in the Northern Netherlands at precisely that moment – the increase in the number of poor people was so enormous and the public authorities were so burdened with war debts that the problem threatened to disrupt society.

England

At the time, England was the region with the most extensive poverty regulations, which had been enshrined in law for centuries in the so-called Poor Laws. It was a generic arrangement, financed by local taxes and implemented locally in parishes. An important fact was that since the end of the 17th century, poverty reduction was coupled with a person's place of origin through the 'Act of settlement and removal'. This place of origin was required to take charge of the poor person in case of emergency. It was legislation that was tailored to the needs of large landowners, and it prevented labour migration to a large extent. Parishes often provided assistance at home or had a workhouse, but the latter was not a legal obligation. At the time of the establishment of the Colonies of Benevolence, the discussion on the amendment of the Poor Law had been in progress for some time, under pressure from the interests of industrial entrepreneurs looking for workers.

In England, too, the number of people depending on assistance had risen sharply and there was a desire to reduce its cost. Large-scale labour mobility was even considered necessary, as spending on poverty alleviation reached unprecedented levels in many parishes, while several industrial centres suffered from a shortage of workers.

The new law that finally came into being in 1834, the New Poor Law, largely abolished the Act of Settlement, forced parishes to work together in a union (to be less local), and introduced the workhouse as the only possible form of poverty reduction. The underlying motivation was that assistance should be 'less eligible': it should not be more attractive to enjoy assistance than to work – so that a minimal number of poor people would actually opt for assistance. Labour in the workhouses also had to be monotonous and extremely unattractive. Workhouses were to be a deterrent; the regime was deliberately harsh.

France

Until the Revolution, social policy in 18th century France was characterised by decentralisation, discontinuity and extreme diversity. Private foundations and voluntary alms were the cornerstones of the support system. Although the State tried to intervene by issuing numerous regulations ordering the imprisonment of beggars, the employment of able-bodied poor and the punishment of recidivists, successive governments failed to have these measures implemented by all the local authorities.

The French Revolution changed this by introducing national rules on poverty alleviation that were binding and for which funds were included in the State budget. Nationalisation and the sale of goods from charitable institutions and monastic orders were to secure these principles.

At the time of the foundation of the Colonies of Benevolence, the innovative regulations introduced by the French Revolution regarding poverty alleviation had long since been reversed. In 1796, public support was again provided only locally, through the municipality, and the rights of the poor were thoroughly restricted.

In 1818, when the Colonies of Benevolence were founded, the basic reference framework for poor relief consisted of:

- Outdoor relief, which referred to assistance (in cash, in kind or medical care) provided outside an institution – e.g. in the homes of the poor. The first 'patronage' organisations, i.e. guidance provided to the poor by socially committed citizens, existed in Hamburg and also in Glasgow (Thomas Chalmers, as of 1815);
- Indoor relief, which was assistance given inside an institution such as a workhouse or a poorhouse. Basic schemes were:

Poorhouses (*hospitaux généraux*) for the infirm. These were basically small or large houses or institutions providing lodging, food and care for the impotent poor;

Alms-houses (*maisons-dieu*) for the elderly. These refer to a series of small individual houses at the disposal of the elderly poor. As a system, these date back to the Middle Ages;

Workhouses (*dépôts de mendicité*) for the idle poor. These were closed institutions where able-bodied poor were given assistance and put to work. The focus was mainly on trades or industrial work.

TRADITION OF CREATING NEW LANDSCAPES

North-western Europe is renowned for its long-standing tradition of land reclamation and cultivation. From prehistoric times, many forest and salt marsh landscapes were cultivated. During the Middle Ages, that process was continued through the reclamation and clearance of the bogs in the Central Netherlands and the monastery cultivations in Flanders and France. In the last five centuries, too, numerous lakes were drained, heathlands ploughed and sand drifts 'tamed'. In the 17th century this led to man-made cultural highlights such as De Beemster polder in the Netherlands (now a World Heritage site) and, a century later, to the agricultural abundance in the Waasland polder area ('the garden of Flanders'). At the basis of all these makeable landscapes were new techniques and innovative partnerships. 'Unproductive wilderness' was transformed into prosperous lands. The early 19th century Colony landscapes are an integral and valued part of this impressive series.

In the second half of the 18th century, a movement existed in Europe which claimed that agriculture was the only source of wealth propagation: the so-called physiocracy. The economic policy of Napoleon seemed to confirm that assumption. Investments in industry (rather than in agriculture) provided the workers with added purchasing power, but did not solve food shortages. To deal with that problem the expansion of agricultural production was required. In the Southern Netherlands the governess, Empress Maria Theresa, had in 1772 issued an ordinance obliging the municipalities to either cultivate rough ground or sell it for the purpose of cultivation. At the beginning of the 19th century, the Napoleonic regime stimulated the large-scale cultivation of dunes, heathlands, peat bogs and other rough ground in the Netherlands. At that time, reclamation of land deemed unfit for agriculture was a hot topic amongst investors and civilians.³

In 1809 and 1810, the ruling King Louis Napoleon by Royal Decree established committees to distribute the heaths and peatlands in border areas that had been in common use until then, and turn them into fertile farmland. However, little support was found among the population, and the mixed agricultural practice proved too dependent on the common rough ground.

The idea of the Society of Benevolence to stimulate agricultural production by drawing on the poor urban proletariat to cultivate the heaths, fitted in nicely with the physiocratic logic. Moreover, at the time of the foundation of the Society there was a large demand for farmland in Europe. The memory of Europe's dependence on grain imports from the Baltic States during the period of the Continental System (1806-1814) was still vivid. The assumption was that from then on Europeans would have to rely on domestically produced food supplies instead of imports.

COLONISATION

The idea of domestic colonisation, as developed by the Society of Benevolence, reflects the long European tradition of colonising areas – within Europe itself and overseas – and the practice of establishing settlements and making land productive through labour and slave labour. Colonisation is of all times and places. At the height of the Hellenistic civilisation, the Greeks colonised large parts of Southern Italy and Asia Minor, the Romans established settlements to the furthest corners of their empire, and from Scandinavia Vikings set up settlements from Iceland to Russia. In the Netherlands, too, from prehistoric times onwards, empty areas were cultivated and colonised.

A different form of colonisation was introduced around 1500, when new shipping routes from Europe to Africa, India and the America's were being discovered. This led to new settlements established by countries like Spain, Portugal, France, England and the Netherlands. The Republic of the United Netherlands had ample experience in that field.

Through the trading enterprises of the Dutch East India Company (VOC, 1602-1798) and the Dutch West India Company (WIC, 1623-1674), the Republic controlled parts of Asia, Africa, South America and North America. After the French period (1795-1813), only the Dutch East Indies, Suriname and the Dutch Antilles remained, but the colonisation practices continued within those territories..

CAREFUL DESIGN AND PLANNING OF LANDSCAPES, STANDARDISATION

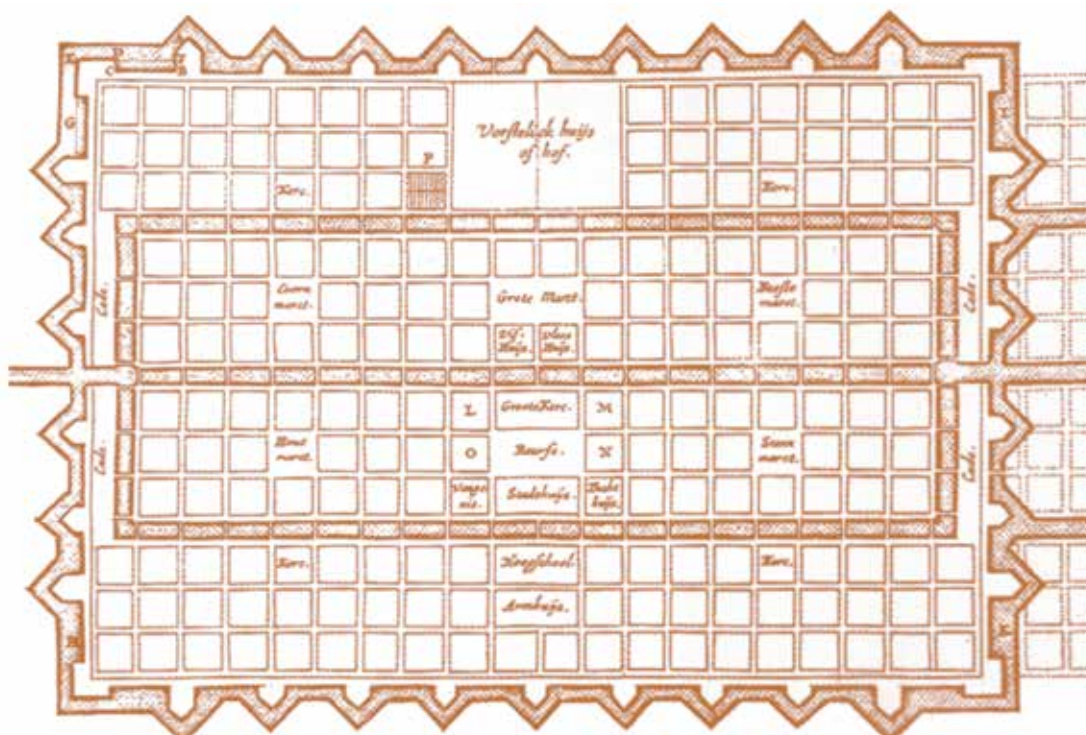
At the beginning of the 19th century, many engineers designed public works, buildings and even urban development plans. (Military) engineers at that time, such as Johannes van den Bosch, the initiator of the Colonies of Benevolence, had been educated in classical design theories and the architecture of Vitruvius,

Palladio and Scamozzi. They were familiar with the ideas of the *città ideale*, checkerboard patterns, the ideal square, the use of vistas.

In the Netherlands, the ideas of Flemish engineer Simon Stevin on settlements had played a significant role, in particular his 'Ideal Plan for a City', published in 1649.

Form follows function was a basic principles in land reclamation since the middle ages, resulting in straight lines and standard plots. The Colonies can be seen in lighth of this tradition of landscape planning in the Netherlands, supplemented by contemporary ideas on creating new settlements.

From the 17th century onwards, designed landscapes had become popular, also for agricultural land with settlements for the new agricultural community. De Beemster polder is an exceptional example.



← Simon Stevin the Ideal City

With its rational geometric layout it was designed as an architectural landscape.

Claude Nicolas Ledoux had already become famous all over Europe with his *Les Salines Royales* and ideas for an ideal city in Chaux (mid 1770's – 1804). Furthermore, Jeremy Bentham had published his ideas on panoptic environments.

Classical layout principles were also applied in overseas colonies, often with scant regard for topography. As a generality, wherever new settlements were to be established, their layouts were given

careful thought and were rationally considered in relation to the aims of the new settlement.

Within the different spheres of influence, practices and experiences were exchanged through models and sketches of real and imaginary plantations. In a British context, “the Grand Modell” of Lord Shaftesbury has been very influential.⁴ But although there was some common practice, no model book of physical planning standards existed, as the differing sizes of streets, squares and plots in the various colonies attest.

The most common typical physical form of the colonial planned settlement resulted in a rectilinear or gridiron layout of wide streets, embodying classical ideals of symmetry, order and proportion.⁵ This has been called ‘the ultimate symbol of the imposition of human order on the wilderness’.

Even if Johannes van den Bosch was aware of international literature on colonisation and historical examples of overseas colonies of the Portuguese, the Spanish and the British, the references he knew best came from the Dutch experience and his personal working experience. He was familiar with the way the East and West Indian Companies had translated the ideas of Simon Stevin into the settlements they had arranged overseas. He had studied the colonial areas and had written a book on the Dutch Colonial properties,⁵ had stayed in several colonies and had owned a plantation.

Simon Stevin was the founding father of a city design that was a combination of an orthogonal street pattern, stemming from Renaissance ideas of ideal town plans, and Dutch engineering and fortification works. This combination resulted in a unique way of city planning and building, making extensive use of civil engineering works.⁶

In his Ideal Scheme for a City, Simon Stevin reveals a set of structuring principles to guide the foundation and development processes of settlements. In the scheme different perspectives come together:

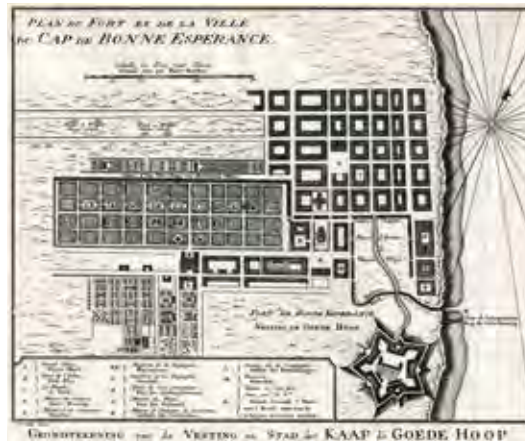
↓
General Johannes van den Bosch, Cornelis Kruseman, 1829 (R.A.)



- A well-balanced, neat and organised ground pattern with proportional relations between street width or canal width and building blocks (2D)
- A functional space with three-dimensional buildings, using a fixed system of measurement in respect of façades, building height and style. All the important functions in their mutual relationships are positioned at the optimal location within the ground plan (3D)
- In the third and final layer the process becomes apparent. The scheme was perfectly suitable for rapid colonisation of an area, for the organisation of newly occupied land, and for the optimisation of the functional aspects of the settlement in a given time. The orthogonal pattern is extendable on all sides and offers opportunities for the standardisation of building types, because of the fixed sizes of the building blocks. This final layer adds a fourth dimension to the scheme and positions it as a planning and building process in time (4D)

The overseas application of Stevin's scheme consisted not so much of formalistic dictates concerning form and architectural expression, but rather of a flexible framework in which to organise the functions, public buildings and spaces of the settlement. In Dutch thinking, functionality often dominates aesthetics.⁷

Johannes van den Bosch had lived in Batavia (now Jakarta), written about Paramaribo and his wife had been born in Cape Town – all of these places he must certainly have known, with a ground plan in line with Simon Stevin's scheme.



↖ Map of Cape Town
Jacques Nicolas 1763

← Map of Batavia (actual Jakarta)
Arnoldus Montanus 1669

↙ Map of Paramaribo
Bellin 1764



2 GENESIS OF THE SOCIETY OF BENEVOLENCE

DIRECT SOURCES OF INSPIRATION FOR THE CONCEPT

Johannes van den Bosch himself indicated that he had brought together ideas that others had suggested before, and that he had incorporated those in a plan that could effectively be implemented.⁸ These ideas were based mainly on insights from economists and agronomists.

*Van den Bosch's interest in poverty relief is associated with his serious study of economics upon his initial return to the Netherlands. He was well-read in the classical literature on political economy, including the works of Adam **Smith**, J. B. **Say**, and the Dutch economist G. K. **van Hogendorp**.*

While his original interest in this study may have been aroused by his Javanese entrepreneurial experiment, his attention rapidly shifted to the administratively derived literature on poverty, due to a widespread subsistence crisis in the Netherlands in 1816/1817, resulting from a volcanic eruption in Java and intensified rampant poverty after the Napoleonic wars.

*This poverty worried Van den Bosch, a senior military officer for whom the convulsions of the French Revolution served as a vivid example of what such an economic crisis might induce. Van den Bosch turned to political economy for solutions, but found that Adam Smith's discourse on *The Wealth of Nations* failed to address this administrative problem. **Ricardo** and other classical authors in the field dismissed poor laws as indefensible constraints on the market, and hence provided no solutions for managing the poor (...) Key theorists of the time on the subject of*

*what is now contrastively called social economy included **Malthus** and the French economist **Sismondi**.*

Thus, Van den Bosch was not an anti-liberal, but was concerned about a governmental problem which could not be solved within the existing economic "laissez-faire" discourses.⁹

In his Discourse, Johannes van den Bosch refers to international sources of inspiration, such as the German agronomist A. **Thaer**, *A treatise on indigence* by **Colquhoun**, **Lawaetz**.¹⁰

As his most important source he mentions the work of Jacob Carel Willem Le Jeun, a Dutch historian, linguist and polyglot, and at that time also an official at the Dutch Ministry of the Interior.¹¹

*Indeed, frequently I have only relied on Mr. Le Jeune, whose recently published and favourably reviewed work entitled: *Historical inquiries into the circumstances of the poor and the practice of begging*, not only provides most of the facts which I required to support my Ideas, but also the names of most of the Writers who in a deliberate manner have dealt with related issues, and to whom one can refer, if required, for further clarification of one's ideas.¹²*

Through his Historical Inquiries, a much wider network of international thinkers who influenced the establishment of the concept of the Colonies of Benevolence comes into view. In the annexes, Le Jeune translates and quotes works considered important by him, which provide new insights in poverty solutions. In appendix C, for example, he provides an extensive list of literature with Dutch and international works on poverty reduction, while in appendix E he explains how the ideas of Malthus complement and correct the thoughts of Smith and Say. In appendix F he addresses suggestions by **Keuchenius** – apart from this an unknown Dutch author – about the establishment of farming populations in undeveloped dune and heath regions.

The international network of the Society of Benevolence

In addition to written sources, there was also a direct network of philanthropists and social reformers with whom Johannes van den Bosch and the Society of Benevolence maintained a correspondence. In doing this they were seeking new insights as well as support for their own initiative. In that connection it is interesting to mention J.H. **Pestalozzi** and P.E. **von Fellenberg**. Kornelis Mulder, teacher at the first agricultural institute of the Colonies of Benevolence – the institute that put their pedagogical insights into practice – had been trained in Hofwil (in Switzerland).¹⁴

With Robert **Owen** (New Lanark and New Harmony) there was also direct contact in the founding period. His son made a study trip to the Netherlands, where he visited Frederiksoord, Ommerschans and Veenhuizen.¹⁵ In April 1819, Owen sent articles to newspapers in which he demonstrated that his own plan for the establishment of colonies was not all that strange, not all that isolated as one might have thought. To serve as an example, he drew attention to the creation of the Society of Benevolence and to the similarity thereof to his own plans.¹⁶

Much later, Robert Owen went even further and claimed that his own concept had been at the basis of the Colony concept of the Society of Benevolence, which was elaborately refuted by a number of authors, including Le Jeune.¹⁷

A select group of international philanthropists and social reformers were appointed honorary members of the Society of Benevolence. They were selected on the basis of their ideas and prestigious contributions in areas considered important by the Society. For example, the aforementioned R.D. Owen, J.H. Pestalozzi and Philipp Emanuel von Fellenberg were honorary members, but also the Duke of Bedford, Léopold de Bellaing, the duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, J.D. Lawaetz and the London Cooperative Society (M. Baldwin). These

illustrious contemporaries of Johannes van den Bosch were very much obliged for this, as demonstrated by the subsequent correspondence.¹⁸



↑
Design for New
Harmony, Indiana
– not implemented

←
Bentham, Panopticon or
the inspection house

A PANOPTIC LANDSCAPE. JEREMY BENTHAM AS SOURCE OF INSPIRATION?

“The more we are watched, the better we behave.”

In the Colonies of Benevolence the envisioned transformation of the poor into disciplined citizens was articulated through regulations and systems, mandatory uniforms, the work schedule, the Colony's own monetary system as well as the organisation of the landscape and the built facilities. The whole approach was focused on supervising the movements of the colonists and ensuring that they were kept inside the Colonies. The closed and regulated nature of the community ensured that the Society of Benevolence controlled every aspect of the inhabitants' private and public life. The idea of disciplining people through labour, education and the creation of a sense of morality, and to make them comply with an imposed civil norm, can be characterised as a form of social engineering.

Panopticon = social discipline

The Colonies are very similar to the model of the panopticon as described in 1791 by the British lawyer and social reformer Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), and particularly the variant for the poorhouses.¹⁹ Bentham was a prominent philosopher of law and an early advocate of utilitarianism, an ethical movement which assesses the moral value of an act on the basis of its contribution to the general interest, or in other words: the welfare and happiness of all people. Bentham championed individual and economic freedom, the separation of church and state, freedom of expression, equal rights for women, animal rights, the abolition of slavery and of physical punishment (including for children), the right to divorce and free trade. He was in favour of a tax on inheritances, restriction of monopolies, pensions and health insurance.

Bentham's idea of the panopticon is now associated mainly with a prison model, but his intentions were broader, as indicated by the full title of his 1791 work: *Panopticon; or The inspection-House: containing the Idea of a New Principle of Construction applicable to any Sort of Establishment, in-which Persons of any Description are to be kept under Inspection: and in particular to penitentiary-houses, prisons, manufactories, houses of industry, mad-houses, work-houses, lazarettos, poor-houses, hospitals, and schools, with a plan of management Adapted to the Principle*. In his panoptical utopia, Bentham extends the mechanism to the whole of society: the important thing for him is social discipline. The social engineering, as effectively carried out by the Society of Benevolence, closely reflects his dream of a 'social technology' embracing society as a whole.

The National Charity Company, concept by Bentham

From unpublished correspondence and discourses, it appears that Bentham himself had developed a concept for a National Charity Company, a national public-private undertaking for the operation of institutes for the poor across the country, working with a membership system. This was meant as a reform of the Poor Laws. Charity is misleading as a word, because the assistance only followed after work had been done. It is unclear whether the founders of the Society of Benevolence were aware of this plan, which was never implemented. The fact is that a number of Bentham's confidants and associates, as well as his French editor (Ruggles, Colquhoun, Benjamin Thompson (Count Rumford), A. Duquesnoy) are mentioned in the Discourse written by Johannes van den Bosch and the main resource he used.

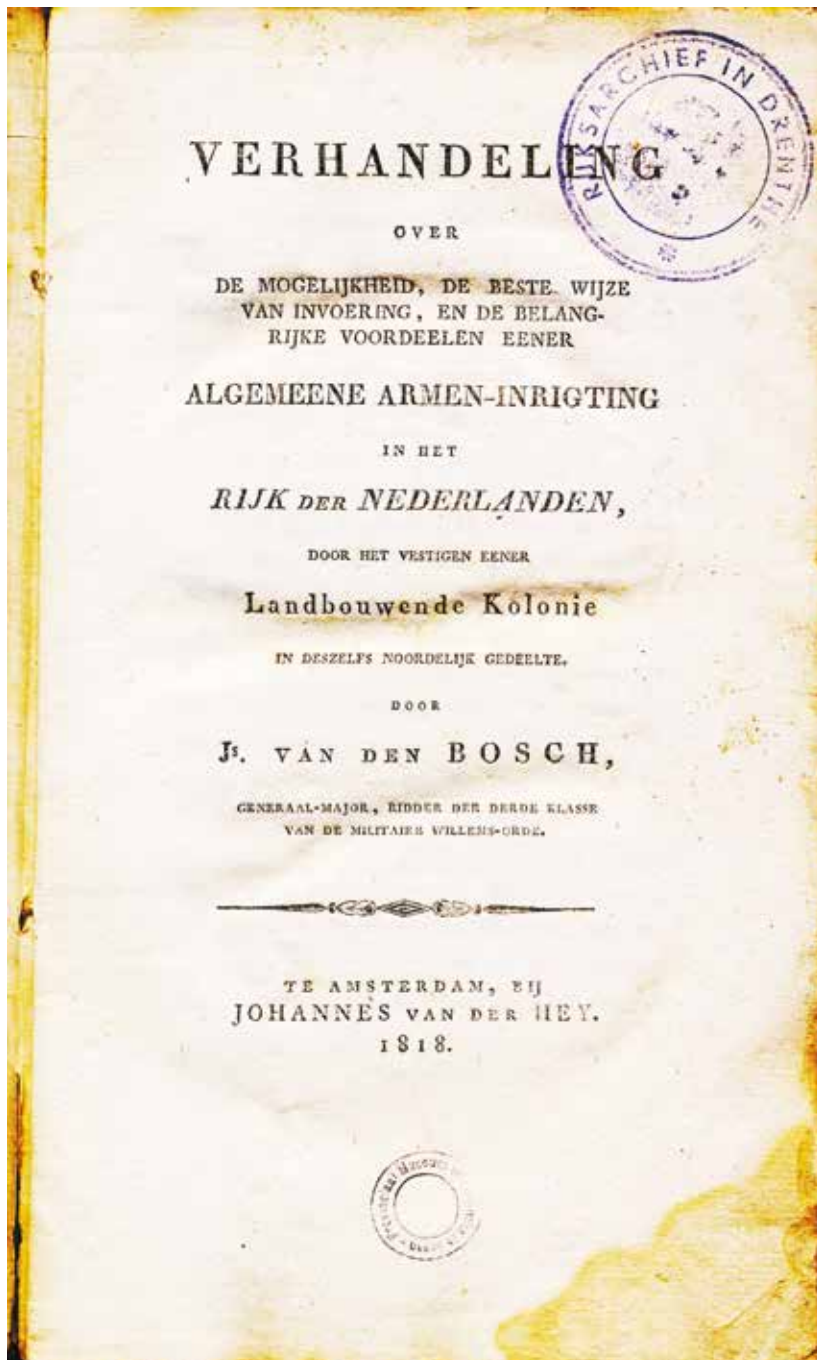
The parallels with the Society of Benevolence had already been noted in the 19th century. In 1829, the magazine *De recensent*, ook *der recensenten* (The critic, also of the critics) published the article *Something about Jeremie Bentham*. There, we read: *'In 1797 he published Pauper management. In that Work he proposed to substitute the institutes for the poor in every municipality in England by development for England: it is pleasant for every Dutchman to refer in this instance to the laudable example provided by the Society of Benevolence in the Netherlands, which, although the bias nowadays sometimes expresses objections, cannot be said to have anything but a salutary effect on the Netherlands.'*²⁰

Spatial arrangement to enhance internal sense of power

Central to disciplining is the norm, the power of normality. An individual that can be described, measured and compared is an individual that can be normalised, controlled, corrected and trained. Disciplining proceeds by means of techniques (the bell, the schedule, the daily routines...) but also by linking actions with spaces. The location of buildings and their layout contributes to an internal sense of power. The very idea of being part of a system where one can at all times be watched is sufficient to ensure tranquillity and order.

It is striking how disciplining in the Colonies takes concrete shape in all kinds of regulations and systems: the mandatory uniforms, the schedule, the Colony's own money system... But also the organisation of the built facilities. Staff houses, moats and barracks, for example, are strategically situated, and the buildings are laid out in such a way that effective control is possible using a minimum number of supervisors: the square shape, the positioning of the supervisors' premises between the halls. In 1823 Van den Bosch himself writes: *'... then there would be not so much wrong with dividing the building in two, although I myself would always prefer one single large interior space, as the director will then be able to observe everything at one glance...'*²¹

↓
The 'Discourse' in which
Johannes van den Bosch
presents the idea to establish
agricultural colonies, 1818
(M.v.W.)



AIMS

The Society sought to create work for unemployed paupers and did not offer charity. The domestic colony was to be the mechanism. A totally new mechanism, that filled a gap in the existing instruments.

The Colonies were meant to be self-supporting, and hence reduce the cost of pauper relief. As some of these paupers were considered unsuited for agricultural work, a military-like level of supervision was introduced to the Colonies to serve an educative and rehabilitative function. Although punishment occurred, the Colonies were not punitive penal institutions.

Their aim remained to provide a national solution to rampant poverty, to reduce the cost of pauper relief, to transform paupers into ideal citizens contributing to the nation's wealth, and to transform isolated wastelands into a productive Dutch landscape through the introduction of superior forms of cultivation.

Providing work for the poor and training for orphans was the principal strategy, but it encountered opposition if this cheap labour undercut wages in trade and commerce. At the same time, the prevailing economic theory of 'physiocracy' argued that the wealth of nations derived fundamentally from the value of their agriculture. Following this idea, governments, especially those impoverished at that time, like the Netherlands, sought to expand their areas of agricultural land either by creating colonies abroad or by cultivating unused land at home.

In line with this concept, the Society of Benevolence adopted the aim of 'cultivating and rendering fertile lands as yet uncultivated in our Country, and to transfer by way of Colonisation such poor people as judged suitable for this labour', thus killing two birds with one stone.

The ambition of the Society of Benevolence was to offer a sustainable solution for all able-bodied, employable poor people. According to the Society, the cause of their poverty was lack of work, and the socially correct solution was therefore to offer them work.²²

*Moreover, we have seen that this evil arises mainly from lack of employment in society. The most suitable remedy here will, as always, have to be sought in such means as will combat the cause itself, and consequently increase employment.*²³

Johannes van den Bosch regarded poverty not only as an obstacle to the overall prosperity of the nation, but also as a breeding ground for social unrest. In that sense, it was logical that he also had his eye on beggars and vagrants, since for centuries they had been considered a ‘social danger’.

The project had to be a lever for the development of citizens and the prosperity of the country, but also a way of combatting social nuisance and social unrest.²⁴

In addition, Johannes van den Bosch considered that existing systems failed to remove the causes of poverty and were financially unsustainable.

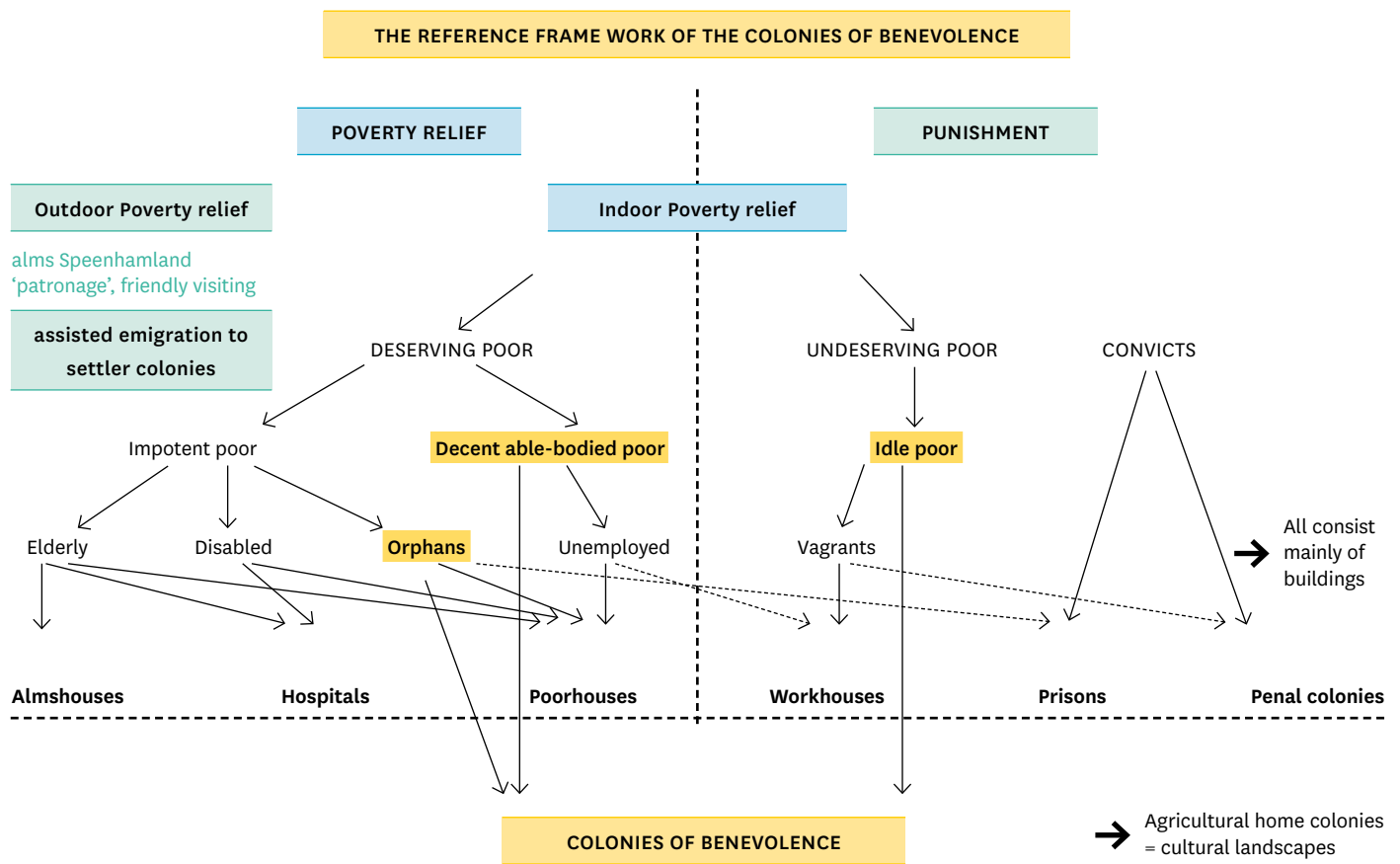
*Because if the poverty of our times is, indeed, a consequence of our present social institutions, and must therefore be regarded as susceptible to an appreciable increase, as the youngest situation in England, and in parts of Germany and Switzerland, invariably seems to prove – then it is also undeniably true that from this, consequences must eventually arise which are dangerous for societal security in general, as well as for the particular interest of the more affluent classes; and that the State, in this way, might become subject to civil unrest, all the more perilous as the numbers of its needy members would have increased, and the tendency, the drive, to help themselves by force to what they have been deprived of through the course of circumstances, should find a strong incentive in the magnitude of their misery.*²⁵

The objective was ambitious: the initiators wanted to reduce poverty arising from lack of employment, and preferably eradicate it. The Colony model had to fill a gap in the existing instruments for poverty reduction.

*We do not feel it incumbent upon ourselves to deal with poverty in general, or with all its manifestations. However, those who are born connected with, or in a state of, defencelessness or outright inability to labour, must of course be and remain subject to local care of civil Government, of the existing charity institutions, or of such Councils for assistance to the poor as have been established for centuries by the various religious denominations, for the support of its impoverished fellow believers. That poverty alone, which springs from lack of employment while willing and able to perform labour, in my opinion demands and deserves our attention, to the extent that we are indivisible and participating citizens of a free State, because it is susceptible, through the collaboration of particular persons, to be positively combated, at times reduced, and perhaps once completely overcome, at least be contained within those limits where it will cease to be burdensome and even dangerous for society.*²⁶

(After description of all kinds of initiatives for poverty reduction)

*I therefore consider it desirable (in order to bring together all that can serve to provide the needy classes with the improvement of their existence to which they are at all times susceptible, through the repelling of Poverty and Begging), that one should establish a relation between the Friendships and the Labour Institutions, and between the latter and the penitentiaries, like the former to the Hospitals and Institutions for powerless needy. In this way, the wide gap between the suffering unfortunate and the incorrigible liable to punishment can be filled. Society in its turn, fulfilling the duties of humanity, will be secured against the onslaughts of indiscriminate poverty and vice;*²⁷



In this way, the Colonies of Benevolence added a new model to the existing initiatives: agricultural home colonies for poverty relief. They situated themselves between indoor institutions for the impotent poor (care institutions) and indoor institutions for the idle poor, such as workhouses (institutions for punishment and deterrence), by their combination of disciplining and educating the poor.

At its inception, the Colonies project was essentially agricultural, but soon introduced a variety of supplementary industries, such as cotton weaving, to generate income. By 1841, it was the second largest exporter of cotton cloth to the Dutch East Indies colony.

The Colonies have been presented as either ‘free’ or ‘unfree’, in accordance with their early history. The so-called free and unfree Colonies are misleadingly contrasted: both are marked by social segregation, confinement, constant supervision, and systems of punitive measures and fines. The free and unfree Colonies were distinguished by the source of colonists (Society of Benevolence vs State) and the funding method, which defined their inmates as either ‘deserving’ or ‘undeserving’ poor (and hence requiring less or more supervision).

PROTAGONISTS: POWERFUL COALITION

The public-private network

The Society of Benevolence was created in 1818 by General Johannes van den Bosch, to implement a national strategy of pauper relief in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars. The Society was a private initiative, supported by the Crown, with local branches all over the country.

Within the group of protagonists, all the social playing fields that could be relevant for the success of the project of the Colonies were represented.

Although Johannes van den Bosch was the overall coordinator and figurehead of the Society of Benevolence, he was backed by an impressive network, perfectly suited to achieve the ambitious goals. Whereas the initiative came from private individuals, it was supported by a number of senior government officials²⁸ and by the royal family. The people who made a crucial contribution to the establishment of the Society of Benevolence were all employed at the Ministry of the Interior.

Initially the role of the State was to create a legal framework, to provide staff (including officials from the Ministry of the Interior, who were involved in the preparations for the establishment of the Colonies, military personnel for surveillance, input

in subcommittees) and financing (loans and tax exemptions, permanent contracts for the placement of the poor). In addition, the initiative enjoyed the personal support of the royal family. There was considerable administrative interlinkage between the Society of Benevolence and the State treasury with regard to management and finances.

General Van den Bosch also belonged to this group of officials from The Hague, albeit that as a soldier he held an independent position. In the early years he was the driving force behind the establishment and further development of the Society of Benevolence.

As a member of the Committee of Benevolence as well as chairman of the Permanent Committee, he played a key role. He was the one with the royal contacts, and also with the willpower and the character to act as project manager.

A decisive factor was also his working experience in the army and the overseas colonies. Van den Bosch began his career in 1797 in the army of the Batavian Republic, as a lieutenant with the Army Corps of Engineers. In 1798, at his own request, he was posted to Java. As a plantation owner, he devoted himself in his spare time to drainage and cultivation of the lands surrounding Batavia, by making use of slaves and the local population. In 1818, at the time of the establishment of the first Colony of Benevolence, he wrote about his experiences:

‘I myself [have] already cultivated a plot of largely undeveloped, although not entirely barren, land measuring a few thousand hectares, and educated to travail a significant number of people, formerly used to spending their time very badly [...], with the happy result that this land, after an eight-year ownership, has been sold at eight times the price of purchase.’²⁹

“THE COLONY-MAN”

Johannes van den Bosch, co-founder of the Society of Benevolence, had started his working life in the overseas colonies. Van den Bosch began his career in 1797 in the army of the Batavian Republic, as a lieutenant with the Army Corps of Engineers. In 1798, at his own request, he was posted to Java. As a plantation owner, he devoted himself in his spare time to drainage and cultivation of the lands surrounding Batavia, by making use of slaves and the local population.

The extent to which the Colonies of Benevolence were in line with the Dutch tradition of overseas colonisation is illustrated by Van den Bosch's subsequent career. He became the mastermind behind domestic and foreign colonisation, which in 1834 led to his appointment as Minister of Colonies. Seven years earlier, in 1827, his directorship of the Society of Benevolence had come to an end after the State had requested him to bring some order to the West Indian colonies: the Netherlands Antilles and Suriname. Van den Bosch proceeded to introduce equal civil rights there for all free citizens, regardless of religion or colour. The position of slaves improved after the introduction of new regulations. Van den Bosch also accepted the patronage of a Surinamese Society of Benevolence, an initiative (1827) coming from the middle classes, coloured people and Jews, who had no access to the elite. He also accomplished the foundation (1828) of a Society for the Promotion of Religious Education among the Slaves and Half-castes in the Colony of Suriname.

In October 1828, three weeks after his return to the Netherlands, Van den Bosch was appointed governor general of the Dutch East Indies. The king was deeply concerned about the large public debt and considered him to be the only person able to render the overseas colonies profitable. Van den Bosch introduced the culture system. Under this system, the indigenous population by way of lease was obliged to use a fifth of its land for the cultivation of products for the European market: indigo, tea, sugar and coffee. In practice, only 6% of the land was used for agriculture, but 70% of the working potential of the population. Although the system served the purpose, it was much abused, which led to exploitation and poverty of the indigenous population. The literary work *Max Havelaar, or the Coffee Auctions of the Dutch Trading Company* by Multatuli, which is now part of the canon of Dutch-language literature, disclosed this to the general public, and had a major influence on Dutch colonial policy.

The culture system is partly similar to the structure of the free Colonies of the Society of Benevolence. Both involved an economic model using in theory free labour, controlled by the government and aimed at maximising production. Another similarity was that both systems in practice led to abuse, exploitation and lack of perspective for the population. It was impossible to meet the basically unrealistic demands regarding agricultural production.

Involvement of the royal family

Prince Frederick – second son of King William I – was chairman for life of the 12-person management of the Society of Benevolence. He effectively exercised this mandate from 1818 to 1856 and played a very active role in the management.

This meant that the initiative enjoyed direct royal protection, which is also evident from the recruitment of members at the founding, the correspondence, the many Royal Decrees and Directives governing all kinds of administrative and financial problems of the Society, and the names of the Colonies which referred to the royal family. The king also repeatedly visited the project.³⁰



In addition to frequent tax exemptions, the royal family itself also made investments until mid-19th century.

Local branches

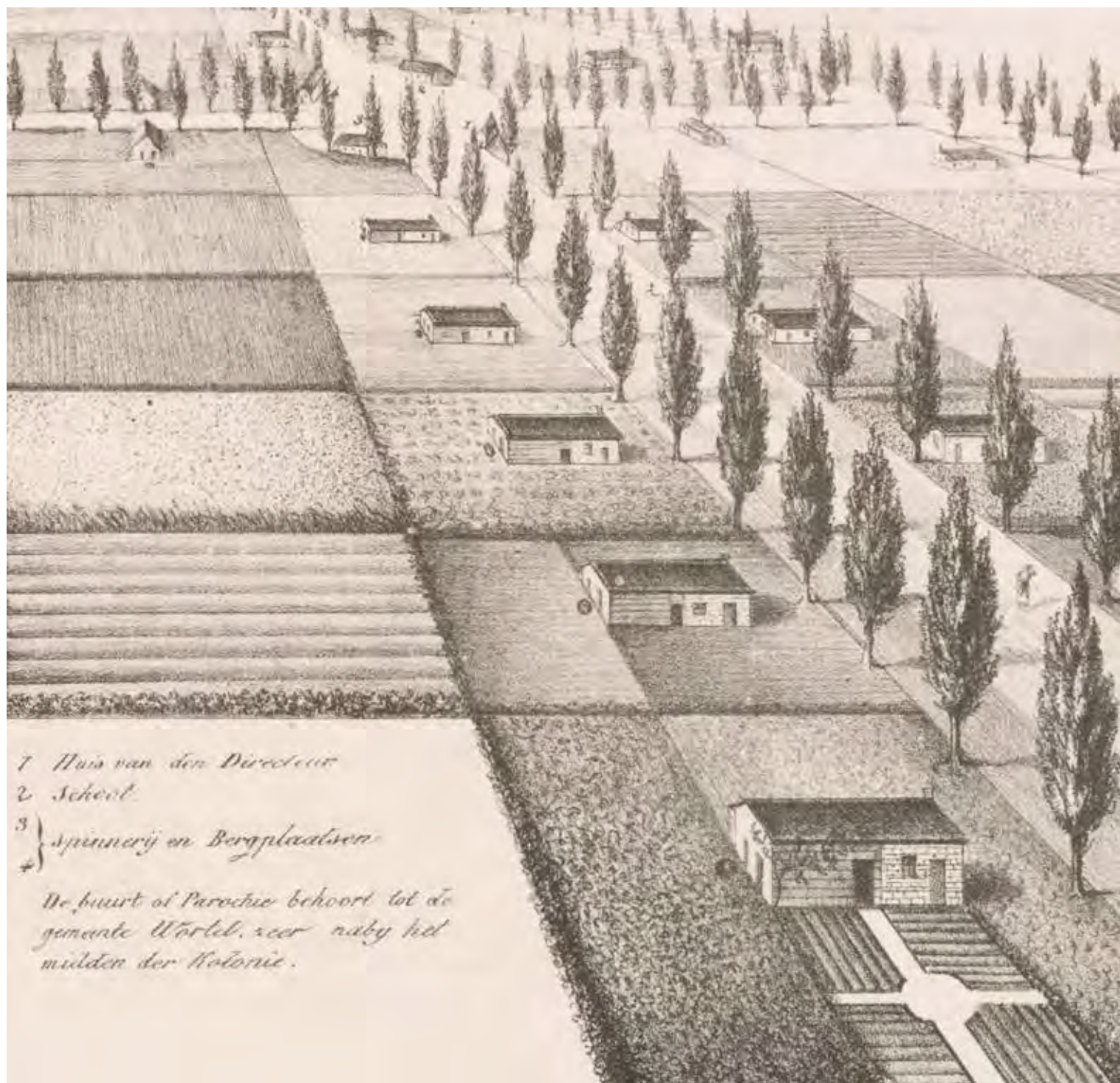
Every Dutch citizen could become a member upon payment of a contribution, but membership was subject to approval by the management.

The members of the Society of Benevolence were united in local departments, which were governed by so-called subcommittees of Benevolence. In these subcommittees local citizens participated, representing local government, the clergy, the high bourgeoisie and the military. In April 1819, there were 21,187 members, divided over 657 subcommittees spread all over the country.

Southern Netherlands

In 1821, on the initiative of William I, the Society of Benevolence was also established in the southern provinces of the kingdom. Prince Frederick became chairman and Benjamin van den Bosch, brother of Johannes, was in charge of the day-to-day management. The objectives were to a large extent similar to those of the Society in the north: the edification of poor citizens through the cultivation of wastelands. The reasons for the establishment in the south were diverse: it was alleged that Drenthe was too remote, and that the national character in the Southern Netherlands differed too much from that in the Northern Netherlands. Both parts had a different political, economic and religious climate. There was no widespread support for the project, but because the initiative this time came directly from royal quarters, many felt that their social position obliged them to become a member. The Antwerp businessman and Member of Parliament Henry Cogels became chairman of the Southern Netherlands branch, and the management included the archbishop, counts, barons and bankers.

←
Prince Frederick, patron of the
Society of Benevolence, around
1840 (R.A.)



1. Huis van den Directeur

2. School

3. } Spinnerij en Bergplaatsen

De buurt of Parochie behoort tot de gemeente Wörld, zeer naby het midden der Kolonie.



PRINCIPLES OF THE COLONIES OF BENEVOLENCE – DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE THROUGH AGRICULTURAL LABOUR

Social engineering: transformation of citizens to be ‘industrious and rational’

Labour was not implemented as a punishment, but as a necessary condition for becoming a good citizen. Work ethic was an absolute core element of the concept. The creation of employment opportunities was regarded as a step in a general civilisation process. The new solution focused on all able-bodied poor. It was not a matter of numbing and repetitive work, but of ‘productive’ employment, which was to train the poor people concerned, but also generate added value for them as well as for society.

How noble and how effective are your attempts, oh laudable Society of Benevolence! to extend the hand of salvation, with generous self-sacrifice, to this profoundly abysmal, and without effective aid hopelessly lost part of the nation, and to put an end to the miserable fate of the thousands of your impoverished, poverty-stricken compatriots, by handing them precisely the two most important means for civil and moral recovery, i.e. employment, to suffice for their self-maintenance, and training, to acquire enlightenment, civilisation and a moral existence!³¹

Rendering productive of rough grounds, of nature, cultivation as agricultural land

The model provided a development perspective for infertile, ‘empty’ land.

Transformation into agricultural land supplied the financial basis for the model (through the increase in value of the land, in addition to the extra food production) and ensured social added value.³²

←
Lithograph of the initial
cultivation of Wortel as free
Colony, 1827 (R.A.)



↑
Visitors watch the construction of the Experimental Colony of Frederiksoord, detail from print. Dirk Sluyster, early 19th century (M.v.W.)

Very accurately, Mr. H. Malthus notes the distinct influence of the modes of support in the following words: "If I were to reduce to some extent the food of my household, and give the surplus to the lonely, I would only impose on myself and mine a deprivation, which to him is of sufficient service, whereas we might easily enough do without it. – If I were to cultivate undeveloped land and present the poor with its fruits, I would be doing a service not only to him but also to society, because everything he consumed will be returned to the General storehouse. But if I were to give money to those poor, and the number of products from the land does not increase, I merely enable him to buy a larger amount of those products than before. Now it will be evident that this increase reduces the share of all the others." ³³

Temporary segregation in a (domestic) controlled environment with order and regularity

In addition to employment, the segregation in a tightly organised, carefully designed environment, with supervision, was the key to achieving the transformation of the poor people concerned. The Colonies of Benevolence presented a very specific plan, that spanned the entire day-to-day life of the colonists. Landscape and regulations constituted a mutually reinforcing continuum. This meant that

every aspect, from the types of buildings to be erected, to how they were built in relation to each other, to the crops to be grown, to the daily schedule of those living there, was to be detailed.

Therefore, the Colonies of Benevolence were closely aligned with the model of the panopticon, as described in 1791 by the British lawyer and social reformer Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832).³⁴ For Bentham, it was not only a matter of an architectural model, but of a mechanism; it concerned social disciplining on the basis of an awareness of being controlled, coming from within. The 'social engineering' as effectively carried out by the Society of Benevolence adheres to this, and the planned landscape was the instrument.

Progressive resources to facilitate the transformation into civilised citizens

To support the colonists in their development, education was an essential part of the model, both basic education and vocational training. By providing education for children as well as adults, and by launching innovative initiatives such as agricultural and forestry institutions, the Society of Benevolence anticipated subsequent State initiatives by more than 50 years. Medical care was also far above standard, and a system of health insurance became mandatory in 1826.

In addition, the model was essentially pluralistic. Religion was regarded as an important moral compass, but the choice was free. Colonists were required to adhere to a religion, but could choose to manifest themselves as Protestant, Catholic or Jewish.

Focus on self-sufficiency

The proposed model focused on self-sufficiency and was therefore meant to be budgetary neutral. In this way, not only subsistence costs were diminished but also, due to the autarchic focus, competition with private (industrial) entrepreneurs was avoided.

Possible surplus agricultural production (which would enter the free market) was considered positive, as there was an overall lack of affordable food. This consideration was a justification from a merely societal perspective of guarantee of food supply.

Focus on society as a whole through a national system

The Colonies of Benevolence presented a nationwide model with a very large capacity, intended to relieve local communities and authorities of the disadvantages and nuisance related to poverty. The public-private cooperation was necessary to start the initiative and also to continue it over time – both as regards funding and organisation.³⁵

To get used to labour, to attach some benefit to labour, is the first thing a management should and can take upon itself. This has been set in motion. We do not want, the State has said to these useless creatures, we do not want the option to remain for you is to die of hunger; we want even less that you drag forth your existence from place to place, like snails do, along a contagious track; that you, in carelessness and laziness, were to live a more enjoyable life than your diligent fellow inhabitant by the sweat of his brow. Choose only between labour by invitation or coercion ()*
(*) That a Government, as a natural consequence of the tacit social treaty, exercises a right in this connection, is obvious.³⁶

Culture of best practice: experimental set-up

Johannes van den Bosch was fully aware of the difficulty of the experiment – but thought that ‘trial & error’ was the best method to make progress. He saw three major challenges: the training of the poor to become laborious colonists, the acquisition of the required area of rough ground, the attraction of sufficient capital.³⁷

No assurance could be given regarding the success: “the experience, and that alone, can be decisive in this respect”.

The certainty that the design will be successful will probably be the first requirement here to be able to count on a mild contribution. However, this can in our opinion never be fully assured in advance, not even by the best discourse: the experience, and that alone, can be decisive in this respect.³⁸

He regarded his written instructions as guiding principles. He understood that these would repeatedly have to be adjusted according to the concrete situation.

“As the construction of a Colony requires a series of measures, all of which will have to be adjusted according to the spirit of the people to be controlled and to the nature of the land to be cultivated, it follows from this that as one can frequently expect considerable differences between preceding and following undertakings, experience gained cannot be considered adequate and as a basis for measuring matters to be subsequently carried out. Therefore, it will be superfluous to go into further details on this subject, as these would only contain repetitions of what has appeared in public print, and in particular in De Star, and all the more because this discourse can never be considered otherwise than as a scheme that must remain susceptible to the necessary changes due to local circumstances.”³⁹

This flexibility was an inherent aspect of the undertaking, but very specifically in the case of agriculture, where tests were permanently being carried out and also being documented.

AGRICULTURAL INNOVATION

In a certain sense, the Colonies were an “agricultural testing ground”. Scientifically substantiated methods were to ensure increased productivity in areas with intrinsically infertile soil and not very productive farmers (due to lack of knowledge and skills). All practical experiments were systematically registered and documented.

The Colonies focused on the improvement of the soil quality through fertilisation, tests of complex systems of crop rotation, the increase of the technical know-how of the farmers in the area and investments in preservation techniques and processing of the production – so that no loss of quality occurred during harvest storage.

In the Colonies of Benevolence, a “best practice” culture was created: successful methods from other regions (with different soil or climatic conditions) and new theoretical insights were introduced through systematic practice tests. In this respect, agricultural practices in Waasland were observed (summer stall feeding, crop rotation without fallow, green manure), the Norfolk crop rotation system (cereals combined with an undersown or second crop), the Rville model farm (Meuse, F).⁴⁰ In the agricultural instructions that the colonists were obliged to follow, the ideas of Thaer, Hermbstadt, Sinclair, Cobbett, Serrurier and Kops are to be found.⁴¹

Examples of innovative initiatives are:

Controlled differentiated fertilisation policy. Different types of fertiliser were used, such as stable manure, green manure, municipal waste, human secretions. There was monitoring of the mix (quantities of each), the chemical quality and the harvest results.

Testing of crop rotation systems. Prior to 1859, an initial four- and five-plot system without fallow evolved into a complex 18-plot system in 1846. The latter led to chaos and poor results. From 1859 onwards, a seven- or eight-plot system was maintained. In 1864 and following years, director Jongkindt Coninck published many articles in the *Landbouwcourant* (Journal of Agriculture) on the subject of agriculture in the Colonies, for example on row crop tests with rye and oats, experiments with the cultivation of peas, vetch and oats as green crop, mixtures of spurrey and serradella and giant clover.

Enhancing the technical know-how of the farmers in the area

Prior to 1859, this was effected by means of comprehensive regulations and manuals for the agricultural practice (the way to collect and process manure, crop rotation systems applied) and agricultural training for all the colonists, as a component of part-time education.

After 1859, new agricultural institutes for secondary education were established: in 1884 the Gerard Adriaan van Swieten Horticultural School in Frederiksoord, followed in January 1888 by the G.A. van Swieten Forestry School, also in Frederiksoord. This school ceased to exist in 1902, due to the diminished number of students. Finally, in October 1890, an agricultural training college was established in 'De Ronde Blesse' near Willemsoord, a property purchased for this purpose.

Ingenious large-scale infrastructure for agricultural activities, storage and processing of the harvests was added after 1859, and was auxiliary in finally reaching self-sufficiency in food production for the Colony population:

- Corn-drying kiln in Veenhuizen (realised around 1860).
To improve ventilation, the building is constructed on brickwork supports
- Establishment of five large farms in Frederiksoord and Wilhelminaoord, functioning as model farms (1864-1867)
- Construction of 'middenhuisboerderijen' (house in between the stables) in Veenhuizen (around 1890)
- Establishment of a butter dairy based on Danish cold-water system (1881)
- Establishment of a model farm in Merksplas (Large Farm, 1880-1890)
- Establishment of underground, sloping potato cellars in Merksplas (1893)
- Vegetable storage under the chapel in Merksplas (1897)
- Cooperative steam-powered dairy factory Deli in Veenhuizen (1898), with 263 members, and processing the milk of 700 cows

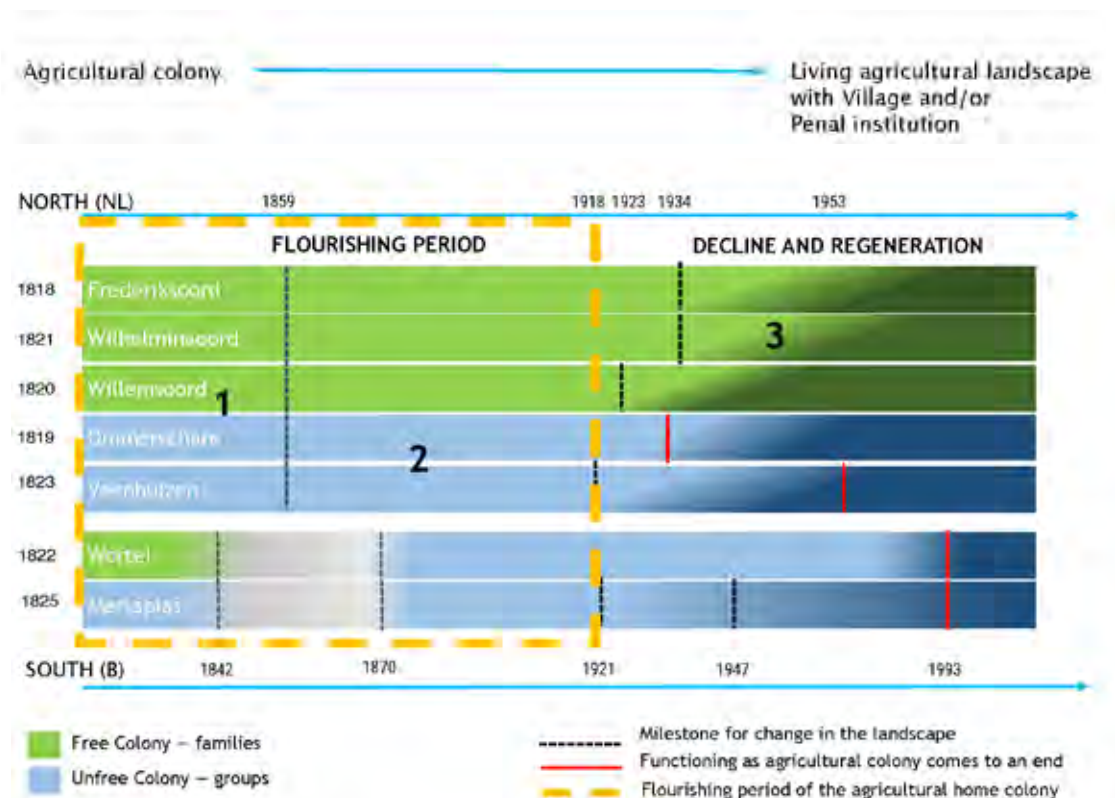
3 DEVELOPMENT PHASES

Three major phases can be distinguished in the evolution of the Colonies of Benevolence:

- 1 First phase: reclamation and cultivation by the Society of Benevolence (1818-1859)
- 2 Second phase: reinforcement of the Colony activities, increased involvement of the Belgian and Dutch States (1859-1918)
- 3 Third phase: gradual decrease of activities as agricultural colonies – evolvement into villages and penal institutions. Redevelopment and valuation of the heritage (from 1919 onwards)

Phases 1 & 2 are to be considered as the flourishing period of the Colonies of Benevolence.

Major milestones



4 PHASE I

FUNCTIONAL CONCEPT

The entire project was based on supervision, discipline and, whenever necessary, punishment, in order to assist the colonists in their moral reformation and so that they could 'free' themselves to re-join society. The notion that the colonists were capable of doing so given guidance, training and incentive, may have been true for some, but in practice there was considerable variety amongst the colonists (sponsored families, unemployed unsponsored families, orphans, criminalised vagrants), entailing a vast range of problems, such as alcoholism, physical disability, mental depression, psychiatric conditions and irredeemable stubbornness.

Supervision thus had to cover these eventualities, as well as the adaptation of the concept to different target groups. Two variants were created within one management system, so called 'free' and 'unfree' Colonies.

Description of functional coherence

In the **free Colonies**, the intention was that families under supervision and according to a strict regime would run small, self-sufficient farms. The standard farm size was calculated for the maintenance of a family of 6 to 8 people. The specifications provided particular instructions on the kind of crops to be grown (and in what quantities), the rotation schedule to be followed and the manure treatment.

As each family had to follow the same specifications, it was obvious that the farms and the plots had to be the same size. The plot layout was fixed with the farm in the centre. After each 10 or so Colony farms there was a small farm of the same type for a district warden, who kept an eye on things and supervised the families. The results of the business operations, behaviour, order and cleanliness were subject to control, but not to permanent supervision.

100 verges pour potager.	Maison.	100 verges pommes de terre hâtives.	
N.° 1. 400 verges pour trèfle, orge et ray-gras.	N.° 2. 400 verges de seigle pour nourriture hâtive dans les étables.	N.° 3. 400 verges pour pommes de terre.	N.° 4. 400 verges pour seigle.
300 verges pour la culture du florin.			

Business was based on a combination of arable farming, horticulture, limited husbandry and forestry (spruce), with cottage industry (spinning and weaving) in each 'unit'. The model for this was based on the existing practice in Waasland, with high productivity on small plots. Livestock, limited to what was required for personal livelihood, was kept in stables. Fodder was grown in the fields, but meadows were not provided. The basis for this was known as 'spade husbandry'; no draught horses or oxen were provided.

The houses had to be simple but offer better living conditions than people in the city were used to. Each house combined a living area with stables and was equipped with a privy. The Society provided the families in their colonists' homes with household goods including sheets, distinctive Colony clothing, furniture and food. This was supplied on the basis of a long-term loan, to be repaid by the colonists through labour. Extra food could be bought in the Colony store with special Colony money.

The farms were connected by straight paths that were in turn connected to a larger grid of roads. The distances between the farms were such as to promote 'moral behaviour'. This made supervision easy. Except for the central access roads, all roads stopped at the boundaries of the Colonies.

↑
Plot lay-out Frederiksoord
de Keerbergh, de la Colonie
de Frederiksoord. 1821

The areas had a canal system for drainage adapted to the subsoil – in wet peatlands (Veenhuizen and Ommerschans) the system was much more extensive than on sand (all the other Colonies).

Supplies were brought in by road and/or by barges along canals and waterways.

In the centre, common facilities were located (a church, a school, a director's home and a warehouse/additional workshop such as a spinning mill).

In the **unfree Colonies**, individuals such as beggars and vagrants or orphans, lived in communal facilities. The living regime was strictly collective, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. All activities were carried out as a group and under permanent supervision.

Colonists lived in a closed central institution, where the supervisors, director and other personnel (e.g., teacher, medical staff) also lived. There was a courtyard with a vegetable garden with two entrances/exits opposite one another.

Women and men lived separately in groups of about 40 per room. They slept in hammocks that were stowed away during the day. For every two halls there was one block of latrines, and there were several central kitchens. The homes for the supervisors and their families were located between the halls and at the corners of the square institution. From their homes, small windows provided a clear view of two halls. Veenhuizen was slightly different in that the guards lived inside the institution, just like the colonists.

The other facilities (school, infirmary, church, spinning room, weaving room, etc.) were also in the building.

Work was carried out in groups on collective farms around the central institution, under the watchful eye of a supervisor. Straight paths connected the Institution with the farms. Because of the size of the group and the distances, it was practical to

concentrate living in a single institution, with several work areas that were directly connected to the surrounding farmland.

Supervisors were housed at strategic points in the Colony.

Essential functional components:

Functionally, the agricultural colony combined living (in individual farms or institutes), work (on land and in workshops) and social services (medical care, training), in a context of permanent supervision (a total institution/panopticon) and intended self-sufficiency.

An essential characteristic was that in the Colony, landscape and buildings were functionally intertwined, and that the area was open (fenceless) within the boundaries of the agricultural colony.

Free and unfree Colonies have a characteristic and highly similar ground pattern that reflects the rational disposition and functioning of the Colony:

- a development axis that connects to the water structure (transport and drainage)
- a functional unit based on the target group (family or individual) and the organisation of work: a family farm or an institution with working farms
- an orthogonal system of straight roads and waterways, connecting functional components
- sizing of individual agricultural parcels reflecting working organisation
- clear boundaries and entrances
- common facilities supporting the functioning of a closed, self-sufficient agricultural colony – e.g. religious buildings, cemeteries, workshops, schools, medical infrastructure

Further variations in the initial ground pattern of the seven Colonies were based on local conditions, experiences and the size of business operations:

- The size of the purchased area determined the initial boundaries.
- The axis of development was grafted onto the orientation of the drainage system.
- Existing infrastructure was used, such as the manor of Westerbeekslot, the guest house and roads in Frederiksoord-Wilhelminaord, an old farm in Veenhuizen.
- The newly created water structure was more or less dominant, depending on whether it concerned peat soil or sandy soil.
- The plot size took into account the way the agricultural plots were cultivated (by a family or by a group of people).

In his treatise, JVDB assumes 1 morgen of land (= approximately 0.85 hectare) to feed one family, provided that the soil is fertile, and enough manure is available. He assumes that neither of these conditions will be met in the Colony to begin with, that it might be necessary to leave the land fallow, so he proposes 2 morgens (= 1.7 ha) with a third morgen of spruce forest. Moreover, calculations should not be too tight ... given that harvests do not always succeed equally well. In actual practice, the trial colony in Frederiksoord started with farms of 2.4 ha. The operating results showed that this was far too small; therefore, from 1821 onwards, the plot size in subsequent free Colonies was increased up to 3.5 morgens (3 ha). The second treatise shows that neither the fallow system nor forestry was introduced on the smallholder plots.⁴²

- The number of farms at the central institution is adapted to the size of the plot and to the type of business operations

Ommerschans: one central institution, with 19 farms (24 were planned) of 42 morgens (35 ha). These were to be run by colonists promoted from Frederiksoord. The colonists in the institution worked on these farms under the supervision of

a district master. The farms are larger than the Colony houses.

Veenhuizen: three institutions with eight farms each.

Merksplas: one central institution with four farms (and four sheepfolds) The maps (historical maps) illustrate what the site looked like before the construction of the Colony and what was first constructed in each Colony, based on van den Bosch's scheme. Apart from Wortel and Merksplas Colonies, there are no design maps prior to the construction.

DESIGN

A scheme

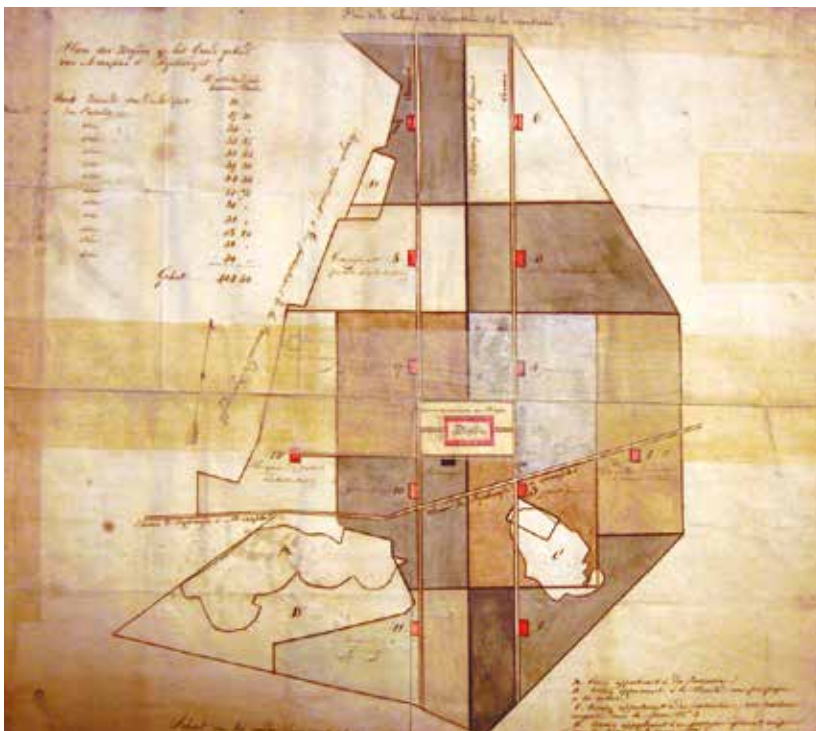
There was no pre-defined building plan for the seven Colonies. The design therefore consists of an idea and sometimes representation by the Society of Benevolence in their communications (as the only sketches left which date from before the start of the realisation of Wortel and Merksplas show, for example).

It was an experiment that started on the basis of the *Discourse* (manifesto) and a set of rules, with an organisation to carry it out in concrete terms. Johannes van den Bosch himself called it a 'scheme'.

'Since the construction of a colony requires a series of measures, all of which must be modified according to the spirit of the people to be administered and according to the nature of the land to be cultivated, it follows from this that there is a considerable difference to be expected between the previous and the subsequent enterprises, that an experience already obtained cannot be regarded as satisfactory and then the things that will have to be done can be measured. It will therefore be superfluous to go into further details on this subject, as they would only contain the repetitions

↓
Design of the plot division in Wortel, forwarded by director Benjamin van den Bosch to the Permanent Committee, 1822 (A.R.B.)

↓
Draft map of Merksplas, undated (A.R.B.)



of what has already been made public in public print and in particular in the Star, all the more so as this discourse can only be considered as a schedule which, due to local circumstances, must remain subject to the necessary changes.’⁴³

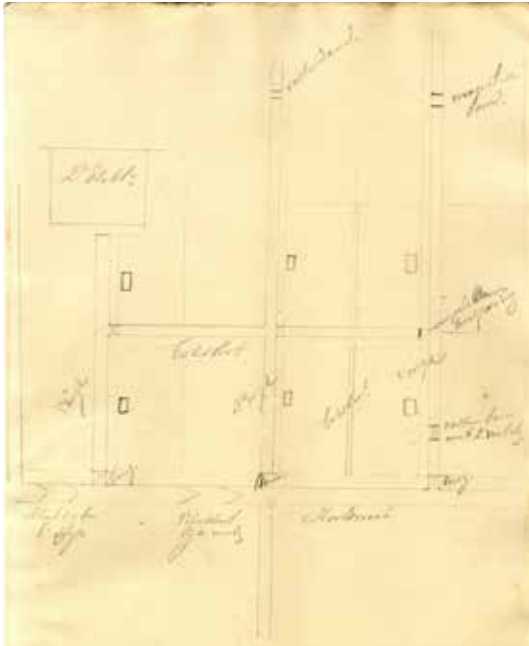
Design principles

However, the design was carefully considered, as it had to facilitate the implementation and functioning as an agricultural colony with a specific social scope. The concept thus resulted in design principles that took into account the functional requirements, organisational considerations and financial constraints of the project.

The design and arrangement had to be affordable and quickly achievable, which meant that it had to be simple, with local materials (without high transportation costs) and carried out as much as possible by the colonists themselves. It had to efficiently use and integrate existing structures – roads, water structures and buildings alike – and be highly standardised.

It had to create a model environment which could be instrumental in the disciplining: thought as a panopticon, based upon the idea that people will function more efficiently under permanent supervision, and the creation of a so-called internalised sense of power (through the knowledge of being watched). The order and regularity in the landscape were supposed to complement the order and regularity in the daily schedule. They supported the disciplining.

The long lines in the landscape helped in maintaining an overview. Elements of control were complementary, for example supervisors’ houses between Colony houses, strategic locations integrated within the institutions, moats around the institutions or control posts around the entire cultivated area of the Colony.



Furthermore, the design had to allow for efficient organisation. Direct connections and short roads ensured greater visibility and prevented loss of time. For the same reasons, the common facilities were placed centrally. The plots were laid out according to the desired self-sufficiency and the number of people who were actually responsible for working the terrain.

The following design principles were adopted:

- ORDER AND REGULARITY
Regularity in the planning of roads, water infrastructure, buildings and planting (especially along the avenues).
- REPETITION
Consistent repetition of identical types and arrangement patterns.
- SYMMETRY
Symmetry in the arrangement of buildings and planting and in the architecture of buildings.
- CONCENTRATION OF COMMON FACILITIES
Communal facilities were given a central place in the area.

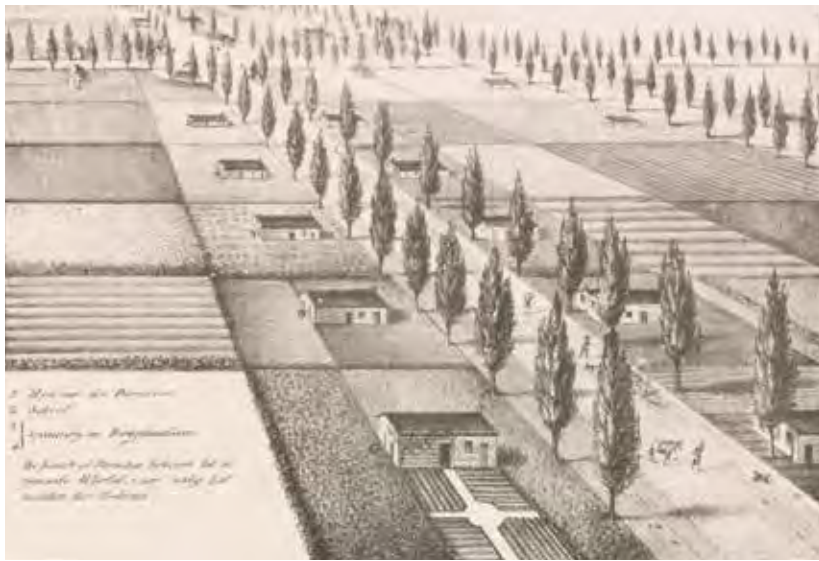
Very quickly (in seven years' time), and on a large scale, the Colonies were implemented on this basis. The agricultural Colonies were set up in wild moors and peatlands where, in principle, there was nothing apart from a few roads, watercourses or limited construction. The boundaries of the purchased area, the already existing roads/water structures and buildings were the most determining 'coincidences' or 'arbitrary design elements' that had to be considered in the construction of a Colony.



The consistent application of the principles resulted in an orthogonal landscape rhythm with a specific pattern, depending on whether it was a Colony for groups or for families.

The evidence for the initial layout consists of topographical maps (usually based on land registry maps), archaeology, reports and descriptions by contemporaries, and inventories.

- ↖ Early sketch of Veenhuizen (D.A.)
- ↑ Original figurative map of Component part A, A. van Riemsdijk, 1836 (D.A.)
- ↑ Ommerschans, 1832 (R.C.E.)



Functional design enhancing the 'model' status

If the design principles of this orthogonal pattern were mainly functional, and creating an architectural landscape was not the primary goal of the Society, aesthetics were not entirely unimportant.

It is clear that “conquering wildness”, linear monumentality, symmetry and order were equivalent to the perception of beauty at the time. An area completely filled up with Colony houses in line was a unique sight. The square-shaped institutions in the unfree Colonies were buildings that in monumentality, scale and central position defined and dominated the landscape to a great extent.

Tree-lined roads, flower gardens at the front of the Colony houses and a fashionable garden in the courtyard of some institutions also met contemporary standards of aesthetics. There are many reports of visitors appreciating the landscape and, together with the idealistic vision and scale of the experiment, this made people apprehend that something outstanding was happening there. It appears that the orderly and harmonious landscape was consciously cultivated by the Society of Benevolence in order to steer the Colonies' public image. It was information for backbench supporters – the subcommittees and members of the national and international public – that was meant to show how much had been achieved.

↑
The Colonies of Wortel and Frederiksoord, as presented in the discourse of Johannes van den Bosch (R.A.)

RESULTING LANDSCAPE LAYERS TYPE α^1 AND TYPE β^1

The implementation of the design resulted in 2 distinctive relict landscape layers.

Colony landscape layer Type α^1 :

Planned agricultural landscape with smallholder farms, communal buildings and permanent supervision set to function as an agricultural colony for poor families.

Tree-lined avenues with standard Colony houses on identical plots of approximately 2.5 to 3 ha, interspersed with standard supervisors' houses and plots. Directors' houses and communal buildings like schools, churches and indoor workplaces were situated centrally. Where space permitted, avenues would be repeated, making an orthogonal grid. Cemeteries organised according to status and religion. (Frederiksoord, Wilhelminaord, Wortel).

Colony landscape layer Type β^1 :

Planned agricultural landscape with institutions with collective farms and permanent supervision, set to function as an agricultural colony for groups of people considered unable to run a smallholder farm.

Central collective institutions with dormitories in the form of large moated courtyards for groups of colonists – with four to eight large surrounding collective farms, each in the order of 12 to 18 times the standard plot and set out within an orthogonal grid of planted avenues and water structures. Cemeteries organised according to status and religion (Veenhuizen).

FORCES DRIVING CHANGE

The land acquired by the Society of Benevolence for all the Colonies (apart from the artillery fort at Ommerschans) was wasteland belonging to the nearby villages or estates. Their owners were persuaded to sell, or were glad to receive the money, but the graziers thereby lost their grazing rights and in some cases objected strongly.

It had been a questionable choice for the Society to acquire this land, as it was open land for good reasons. Nobody had deemed it suitable for transformation into fields, because it was either peat bog, saturated wetland or soil that was sandy to such an extent that crop yields would be minimal. Nonetheless, the Society appears to have been excessively optimistic about modern agricultural techniques, and went ahead with attempts at reclamation, using as much manure as could be found. Where this became infeasible, the most infertile land was planted or left to run wild.

Problems of this nature, combined with falling grain prices, lower-than-expected membership of the Society, and lower-than-expected productivity of the colonists, led to financial problems.

The Belgian Colonies' financial problems, caused by the same combination of poor soil, lack of manure and diminishing membership numbers, led to bankruptcy in 1842. The Belgian State was not willing to extend further financial support after the expiry date of their contract with the Society. Over the next quarter century, the Belgian Colonies of Benevolence were virtually abandoned, trees were felled, and Colony houses at Wortel were a free source of building materials for the local population.

5 NEW START (PHASE 2)

The two unfree Colonies in the Netherlands were taken over by the State in 1859.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the official and police apparatus necessary for carrying out social control was not yet in operation in the new nation State. This issue was solved by public-private cooperation at the start of the Colonies of Benevolence. By 1859 the State apparatus had been developed. Because of the existing administrative interconnectedness, as well as the greater emphasis on social control by governments at that time, it was logical for the State to assume a more important role.

This allowed the Society of Benevolence to concentrate upon the agricultural performance of the free Colonies, which was indeed enhanced through the permanent collectivisation of the land.

However, by the late 19th century the State had determined that in both countries more accommodation was required for those transgressing the laws on vagrancy, mainly as a reaction to a new major poverty outbreak caused by crop failures and a general economic crisis in the second half of the 19th century.

↓
Farm Veenhuizen (J.v.L.)



The remote locations and experience in handling 'problematic inmates' made the Colonies obvious locations for replacement institutions. In Belgium, a new law against vagrancy in 1866 led to the State purchasing Wortel and Merksplas in 1870 to develop the 'State Agricultural Colonies of Benevolence'. In the Netherlands, as from 1869 orphans were no longer sent to Ommerschans or Veenhuizen, so the principal occupants thereafter consisted of an increasing population of beggars and vagrants, including families.

Both States accordingly made major investments in the existing unfree Colonies of Ommerschans, Veenhuizen and Merksplas, and also converted Wortel for this new purpose.

Although parts of the unfree Colonies might seem consistent with 19th century prisons in terms of building typology, the essential difference with those institutions is precisely their functioning as an agricultural colony and the permanent interaction with the surrounding agricultural land. In unfree Colonies, as opposed to prisons, the colonists stayed in halls as opposed to cells, and in groups, and they were put to work on the land. During this period, the legislator himself made a distinction between the Colonies of Benevolence and the prison system (Lunatic Act 1884 in the Netherlands and Law on Vagrancy 1866 in Belgium). The at that time newly built institutions were given the same collective design as the existing ones, with a large courtyard and collective departments surrounding it.⁴⁴

FUNCTIONAL CONCEPT

Functional coherence

After 1859, in order to become more efficient and economically viable, the free Colonies shifted to a more complex management model, with partly tenant farmers and partly collective farms were colonists were employed. In addition, the farming practice changed to more simplified crop rotation systems,

more cattle and meadows and forestry. From this moment onwards, most small Colony farms became houses.

Apart from the bigger scale of operation, specialist vocational schools in agriculture and forestry were set up, and industry-like workshops were added to offer different employment opportunities (such as a dairy and a workshop to make baskets).

The unfree Colonies too changed their operational model, whilst still functioning as agricultural colonies. In order to accommodate and employ more people, the capacity of the infrastructure was extended, and separate zones for working and living were created. Staff housing was added in the Colony, but outside the institution building. Major care infrastructure for colonists with special medical needs was added.

In some Colonies, the agricultural operation became concentrated in one single model farm.

Additional workhouses were added.

Additional functional components

The landscape structure was maintained and reinforced during the further development; its basic form remained, and the functional interweaving of buildings and surrounding agricultural land was retained.

The most important physical changes do not apply to the grid, but to several buildings that allowed finetuning of the model. After the redevelopment in 1859, the basic plan was systematically enriched with new infrastructure, which allowed it to function as an agricultural colony and at the same time respond to a changing context.

The following elements were added to the existing structures:

- Frederiksoord: collective farms and vocational schools, post office and doctor's house

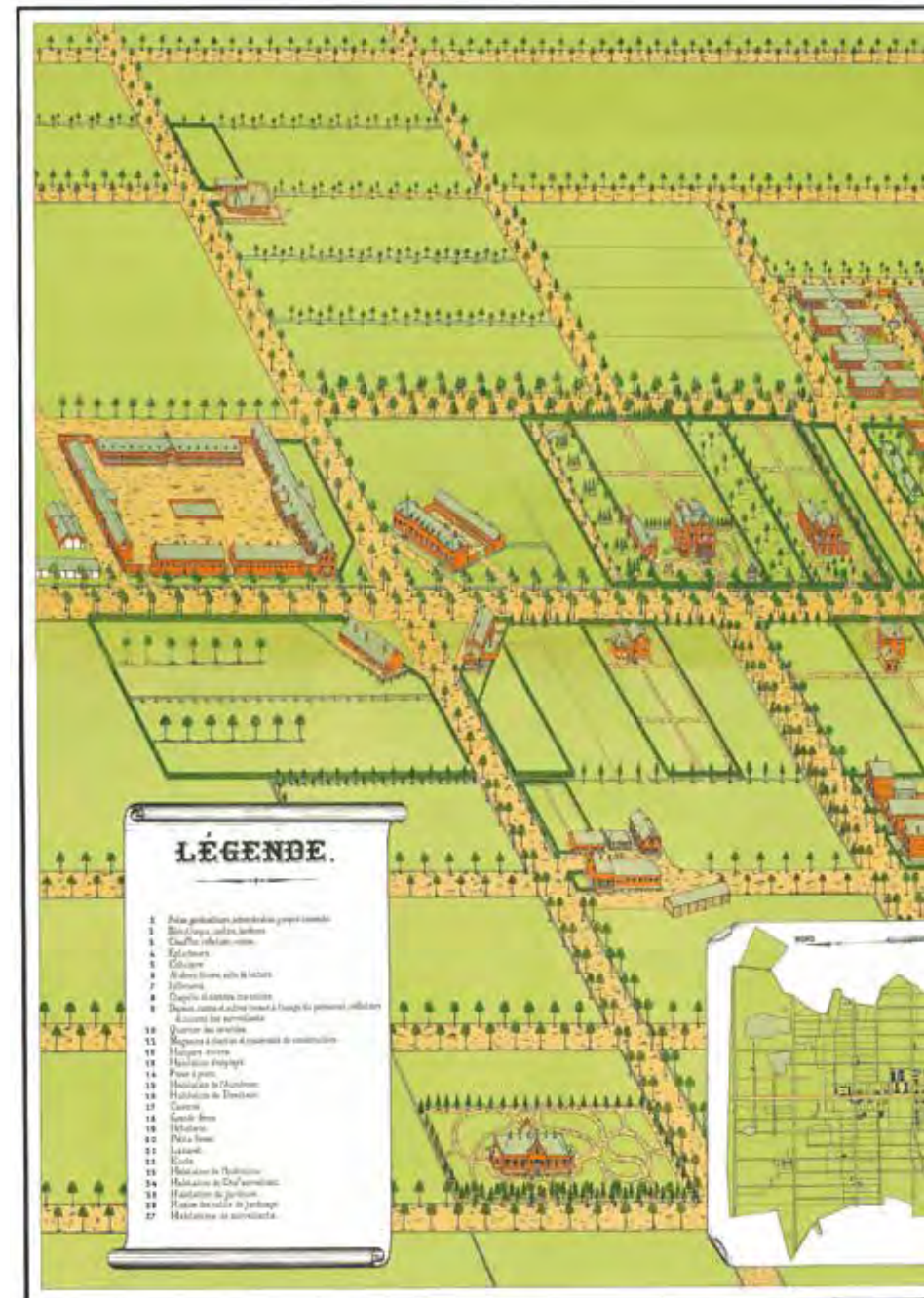
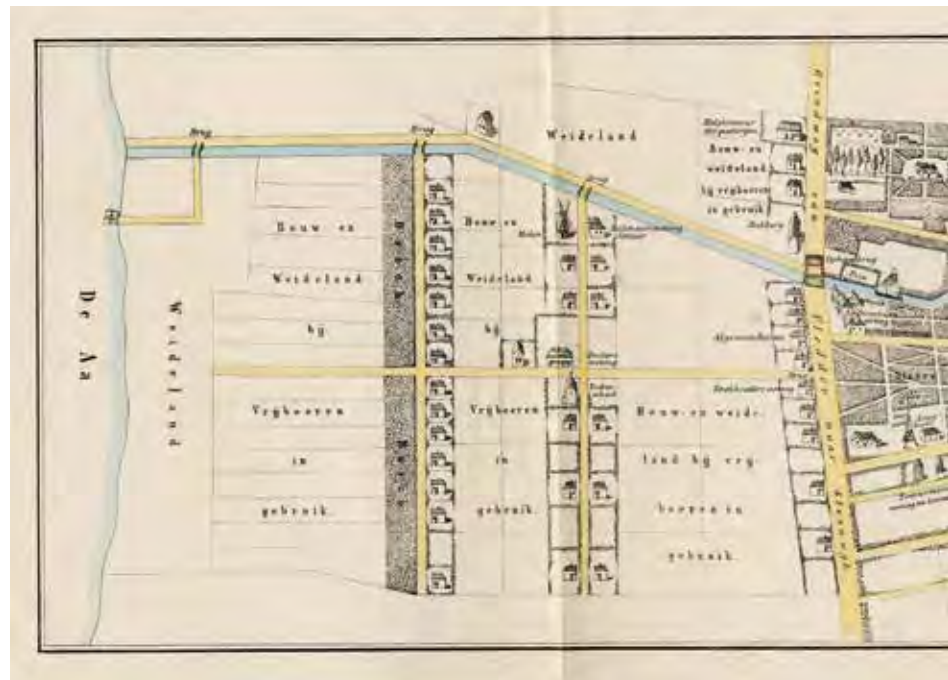
- Wilhelminaoord: collective farms, schools and homes for the elderly
- Willemsoord: collective farms, agricultural school, train station
- Ommerschans: addition of the institution of Veldzicht, staff houses, workshops, farms, Roman catholic church and demolition of institution Ommerschans
- Wortel: a single collective farm, an institution, staff housing
- Veenhuizen: building programme with the addition of staff houses, a big hospital complex including a pharmacist and staff houses, a new catholic church, farms and several workshops. First and Second institutions receive a new residential building, demolition of the Third Institution; old Institutions remain in use for accommodation of colonists and work
- Merksplas: building programme, scaling-up to a single collective farm, addition of workshops and staff housing, construction of moat.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Functionality and the initial design principles of order, regularity and symmetry continued to be the starting point for later development in the State-run Colonies, but in contrast to the initial phase it was no longer the work of surveyors and contractors, but rather of architects and urbanists.

They reinforced the existing landscape structures and emphasised the hierarchy between the axes. In addition, they were also in a position to use new materials and semi-industrial techniques. The later development is quite symbolic: it shows the prestige of the State in carefully worked out volumes and details.

Order, unity and coherence are further reinforced by the materials used, architectural styles, repetition of basic types, use of colour and systematic planting, and are still recognisable today.



The perspective prints of Frederiksoord-Wilhelminaord and of Wortel show clearly how the orthogonal principles of the layout were reinforced by further development.

➤ Typology of the free Colony of long ribbons with Colony houses for families, 1870 (M.v.W.)

➔ Coloured lithograph of the Colony in Wortel, L. Gorby, 1904 (E.N.)

In Belgium the development of the institutions starting after 1870 was masterminded by the architect and urban planner of the city of Brussels, Victor Besme.⁴⁵ Specifically for Merksplas Colony it should be noted that at the time of the construction phase, after the new law of 1866, the buildings had been vacant for more than 25 years. In Wortel Colony most of the Colony farms had already been demolished, due to appropriation of building materials by local residents.

The new buildings in Ommerschans and Veenhuizen were designed by the Ministry of Justice's own architect, the Chief Engineer-Architect of the Department of Justice. Until 1883, this position was held by J. F. Metzelaar sr. In 1886 he was succeeded by his son, W.C. Metzelaar (until 1914). Father and son Metzelaar left their mark on the second phase of the development of the Dutch Colonies of Benevolence, at a time when these were in use as a State institution. They translated the hierarchical panoptic system into architecture. The ranks and positions of the staff were visualised in the building typology and also in the decoration of the buildings. There were seven types of houses, linked to the function of the particular staff member. The office held and the morality were represented in the inscriptions.

The hierarchy of the housing types is particularly visible in the unfree Colonies in the post 1870 buildings.



↖↑
Staff houses type 1 (below left), to 7 (top left) in Veenhuizen, designed by architect W.C. Metzelaar. The higher the position of the personnel, the more spacious the corresponding house (J.v.L.)

Veenhuizen

In 1884, the ministry of Justice introduced the “type system” for dwellings in Veenhuizen. Analogous to the administrative hierarchy, the director’s residence was situated at the top. In 1900, the number of types was expanded from four to seven. The difference in residence type concerned the size and detailing of the house, the size of the garden and the kind of planting. The largest, type 7, is a two-storey freestanding house with an attic, and was meant for directors, doctors and pastors; the two smallest types are one-storey terraced houses for the guards. The types in between are variations on the two-storey semi-detached house for middle management staff.

Within the typology, the number and size of the bedrooms, placement and size of the kitchens and toilets, shared or private, are the distinguishing factors. Within type 7, some houses have lean-to greenhouses on the garden side.

Ommerschans

In Colony IV (Ommerschans), W.C. Metzelaar developed three different types that resemble the types found in Veenhuizen. The freestanding house, type 5 in Ommerschans, is a – richer – variation on type 7 in Veenhuizen. The semi-detached house, Ommerschans type 2, is highly similar to type 4 in Veenhuizen. The terraced house of type 1 in Ommerschans is a two-storey variation on a one-storey type 1 terraced house in Veenhuizen. The remaining types were developed by the architects W. Burgmans (semi-detached house in chalet style) and J.G. Robbers (semi-detached house in cottage style). For many years Robbers, an architect-engineer, was W.C. Metzelaar’s assistant at the Department of Justice. The staff houses in Veenhuizen, also designed by him, are variations on types 1 and 2.

Merksplas

Analogous to the situation in the Netherlands, Victor Besme designed official residences in his overall plan for Colony VII (Merksplas) that reflected the hierarchical system within the workforce. The official residence was part of the salary. The difference was expressed in the size and detailing of the house, the size of the garden and the kind of planting. All houses were constructed of sintered brick.

Type 4 are freestanding villas, surrounded by a lawn, for the higher levels of management (doctor, almoner, sub-director and director). These ample villas differ in type and size. They have additions such as verandas, front steps and decorative ornaments. The largest one is the general director’s.

Type 3 comprises villas for management personnel and specific functions – such as the officers, head warden, chief clerk and agricultural engineer. These are all freestanding residences with large gardens.

Type 2 comprises large semi-detached houses for administrative staff, with two storeys and an attic with a substantial kitchen garden. They are larger than the houses provided for guards (type 1).

RESULTING LANDSCAPE LAYERS TYPE α^2 AND TYPE β^2

Colony landscape layer Type α^2

Second phase planned development with large collective farms and farm building complexes incorporating the earlier individual plots and Colony houses of type α^1 . There are some remaining smallholder farms, but most have been changed into houses. Additional collective infrastructure for education and health care and added religious buildings at various central locations. (Frederiksoord-Wilhelminaoord)

Colony landscape layer Type β^2

Enhanced panoptic Colony landscape, which underlines the power of the State, by an urbanistic reorganisation of an existing Colony landscape. Strengthened emphasis on important, symbolic axes by added plantings and placement of numerous new buildings in a coherent architectural style. Addition of large, mostly new-build, second phase institutions and extensive working facilities both in collective farms and workshops. Additional infrastructure for health care. Dispersed structured ensembles of staff houses at strategic locations within the cultivation line of the agricultural colony. These vary in size, decoration and surrounding garden, according to the hierarchical status of the staff member. Added elements for supervision and confinement, such as barracks and sentry posts (Wortel).

6 PHASE 3 DECLINE AND REVALORISATION

Whilst the institutions assumed an increasingly penal character and social security measures were introduced, the Society of Benevolence's relevance, membership and income from donations was dwindling. It survived through its forestry and farm rents. Income reached an all-time low in the 1920s, and the arrival of new colonists dropped dramatically.

In 1923 it was decided to sell Colony III, Willemsoord. Gradually the houses, the farms, the community building, the staff homes and the factory buildings were auctioned.

Following a 1934 amendment to the articles of association, the accommodation of new colonists' families in the remaining Colonies I and II, Frederiksoord and Wilhelminaord, had definitely become a thing of the past. Several large farms were leased and the free farmer status of a number of farmers was cancelled. The colonist workers became ordinary tenants of the Society of Benevolence.

In the following decades, large losses were suffered amongst the remaining family farmhouses, which had become obsolete and thus uneconomical to retain. The number of original family farmhouses in all seven Colonies to survive past this period was 169, only 30%. The areas evolved into ordinary villages.

Ommerschans changed its target group and transformed itself into a re-education institution for boys, who were trained as farmers at the institution and on its farms. From 1933 it became an institution for male persons declared of unsound mind, with limited agricultural activity that continues to this day. The link with the surrounding farms was gradually severed; most of the farms were sold.

In the other unfree Colonies, the influx of new residents also decreased after 1918; the vacant space in the buildings was systematically filled by penal institutions. In Wortel and Merksplas Colonies, the



farms produced with and for the colonists until 1993. Up until then, people still lived in both Colonies on account of vagrancy charges.

In Veenhuizen the influx of beggars and vagrants had already stopped earlier on, because the criminal law article was no longer enforced. After World War I, the institutions in Veenhuizen gradually changed from institutions for vagrants into penal institutions, until in 1953 the reception of vagrants stopped. In 1954, the farms and the land were transferred to the State Property Department (Dienst der Domeinen) and the link with food production ended.

In the late twentieth century, the trend was to stop the existing practice of compulsory labour in the fields, which led the governments to look into the possibility of selling the land. In the Netherlands, this was what happened in Veenhuizen in the 1980s. In 1993 the Belgian law against vagrancy was abolished, and in 1995 the Belgian government announced its intention to sell their Colonies. However, after public protest, it transferred these properties to regional public organisations.

In the 21st century there has been a considerable interest in conservation and the start of Colony tourism. Meanwhile changes continued, and still continue, at the penal institutions. New administrative wings, expanding workshops and security fencing are the more prominent recent additions.

Agricultural use continues to this day. Social employment still exists in all the Colonies, but it is no longer the main objective.

	NOT PRIMARILY FOR POVERTY DEDUCTION AS OF	LANDSCAPE CEASES TO PROVIDE AGRICULTURAL WORK AND FOOD FOR COLONISTS
Frederiksoord	1934 – privatisation, evolution towards village	1934
Wilhelminaoord	1934 – privatisation, evolution towards village	1934
Willemsoord	1923 – privatisation, evolution towards village	1923
Ommerschans	1933 – institution for people declared of unsound mind	1933
Wortel	1993 – transition phase, partly re-use for prison	1993
Veenhuizen	1918 – 1953 transition phase poverty reduction – partly re-use for prison	1953
Merksplas	1921 – transition phase, introduction of penal institution for prisoners with special needs in part of the Colony, 1947 - introduction of regular penal institution in part of the Colony	1993



↑
Orhophoto of Wortel, 23.12.2012
(information Flanders)

7 INDIVIDUAL COLONIES

FREDERIKSOORD (COLONY I)

Milestones

1818	Foundation of the 'experimental' Colony at what is now Frederiksoord
1823	Start of the Institute for Agriculture in Wateren
1860	Start of Collectivisation – building of the large farms
1884	Founding of Horticultural School
1887	Start of Forestry School
1934	Poor families no longer admitted, start of partial privatisation
1960	Society of Benevolence becomes a foundation

Evolution of the landscape

BEFORE

Westerbeeksloot Estate with some roads, a small plantation, a lodge and a hotel, surrounded by a large area of heathland.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the border area between the three provinces of Drenthe, Fryslân and Overijssel consisted of an inaccessible boulder clay plateau, covered with wet heath, peat lakes and raised bogs, with scattered headlands with dry heath. Civilisation began some kilometres to the east and to the west, in the form of the 'esdorp' landscape (villages with farms around a central common green, surrounded by fields adjacent to the village, heathlands used for grazing and 'madelanden' in the brook valleys,

used for the production of hay, situated higher up on the moraine of Steenwijk (Overijssel) and the higher sand plateaus around Vledder (Drenthe). The sand farmers at that time used the wilderness for grazing sheep and cutting sods and turf. A few winding dirt roads connected village and field.

To the north and the south, too, the wilderness was bordered by an inhabited agricultural landscape, in the form of old cultivated peat landscapes with their characteristic linear plots. These were the cultivations of Peperga, Steggerda, Nijensleek and Wapserveen. As early as the 12th century, cultivations had been taking place here, with the small rivers of Linde (southeast Friesland) and Wapserveense Aa (southwest Drenthe) as the starting point. The valleys themselves were used mainly for hay making by the farmers from the peat cultivation villages.

Striking structures in the landscape included the barge canal, situated south of the village of Noordwolde, which was dug in the 17th century for the transport of turf (fuel from peat) from the moor, and the Westerbeeksloot estate, including the mansion on the main road between Steenwijk and Vledder. The estate, situated in the middle of the heath and peatland area, was easily accessible via the Wester-beeksloot barge canal and roads to Vledder in Drenthe and Noordwolde in Friesland.

PHASE 1 — 1818-1859

CREATION OF LANDSCAPE LAYER α¹

Creation of a new small-scale Colony landscape with smallholder farms

As a location for the establishment of the very first Colony, the Society had opted for the large Westerbeeksloot estate in the province of Drenthe, covering some 600 hectares. This area contained forests, some arable land and heaths, next to a mansion. The Colony was named Frederiksoord, after its patron, the Prince of Orange.

A road (today's Major van Swietenlaan, the N855) crossed the estate in east-west direction and a hotel was located alongside.

In 1818 the first free Colony, containing 53 farms, was established south of Westerbeeksloot estate. One year later, a start was made on the second Colony, with fifty farms, east and north of the estate. In 1823 both Colonies were merged, and from 1825 they were jointly referred to as Colony I.

The cultivation started out on the basis of the existing infrastructure, such as the Westerbeeksloot barge canal and the main road between the villages of Steenwijk and Vledder. To facilitate the cultivation, the Westerbeeksloot was widened and lengthened to enable transport by keel barges, and two branch canals were dug perpendicular to it. The main road to Vledder divided the first and the second Colonies and became the heart of Frederiksoord, also because of the presence of Huis Westerbeek and the adjacent guest house. As the property owned by the Society of Benevolence extended further north, the Koningin Wilhelminalaan, which ran in northwest-southeast direction, took on increasing significance. Parallel to this avenue ran the ribbons with Colony farms of the second Colony (currently: Hooiweg, Vaartweg and M.A. van Naamen van Eemneslaan). Along these roads, at 60-metre intervals, identical Colony farms were situated, in single-sided or double-sided ribbons.

Each of the 53 Colony houses situated along the roads and the Westerbeeksloot had an adjoining plot of land for a vegetable garden and an orchard. The plots belonging to these farms measured 2.4 hectares and were bordered by narrow ditches. Although the plots were cultivated in an orderly structure, the infrastructure of Frederiksoord is not linear, because it connected with precolonial roads and ditches, and with the Westerbeeksloot estate.

In 1830 the contiguous Colony landscape around Frederiksoord consisted of about 4,000 hectares of land. From each colonist's house, an average of 2.5 hectares of land adjoining it was cultivated and worked.



After a few years it was found that the Colonies were not functioning satisfactorily: the canalised Westerbeeksloot, for example, often ran dry in summer and neither the poplars, which had been planted alongside the avenues, nor the crops proved to be resistant to the infertile sandy soils on which the agricultural systems were tested.

PHASE 2 — 1860-1918 ADDITION OF LANDSCAPE LAYER α^2

Addition of large collective farms and extra education facilities within the existing landscape grid

Around 1859 it was decided to collectivise the farming of the land.

The existing smallholder plots were assigned to large new working farms measuring around 50 hectares. The internal division of the original plot (with vegetable garden and orchard) disappeared, but not the outlines. In Frederiksoord the farm Hoeve Koning Willem III was added in this way. The aim of this approach was to improve not only agricultural production, but also the disciplining of the colonists.

↑
Houses on the Straatweg in
Frederiksoord, Willem Ball,
early 19th century (R.A.)



The former horticultural school in Frederiksoord (J.v.L.)



Forestry school G.A. Van Swieten in Frederiksoord (M.v.W.)



Former forestry school G.A. Van Swieten in Frederiksoord (J.v.L.)

The road structure was preserved. The Horti-cultural School (1884) and the Forestry School (1887) were added to provide more in-depth education.

PHASE 3 — 1918 – NOW

Change of scope of the Society of Benevolence, privatisation and evolution into ordinary village

Only about eight Colony houses had disappeared during the creation of the collective farms, but mid-20th century many more were removed. In the area opposite the Westerbeekslot, a new housing development was added.

In the 1980s, the horticultural school expanded its area, fostering ambitions for a horticultural college and a permanent garden show, and also to create student accommodation. Further to the east show gardens, an events area and a visitors' centre (which it is again now) were established, accompanied by a new roundabout and a car park in the southern part of the Colony.

In this century a project was undertaken to replace around 60 lost Colony houses by sustainable modern versions, on their historical locations. This has included all the former Colony houses on the Molenlaan to the south, for example.

Agriculture is still a major economic driving force in the free Colonies. By now the collective farms have all become private enterprises, while the smaller Colony farms have been redesignated as private housing. Since 1960, the Society of Benevolence has been a foundation, with the primary goal of preserving the cultural heritage values and stories for posterity. It acts mainly as the administrator of land and property. The Society still owns a substantial part of the land (1,300 hectares) and 60 buildings, and exploits these on a non-profit basis. Since 2015, together with the municipality of Westerveld and the province of Drenthe, it has been developing projects to restore and reinforce the authentic Colony landscape, and it has established a Colony Centre, which hosts the new visitors' centre and activities related to the Colony.

Social economy is limited to facilitating housing (Kiemhuis – potato germ house) and work for Wajong youngsters (Invalidity Insurance (Young Disabled Persons) Act) on benefits, and/or day centres. Small-scale support is provided to societies and organisations in the region.

WILHELMINAOORD (COLONY II)

Milestones

1820-1822

Wilhelminaoord, Boschoord including Vierdeparten were initially founded as free Colonies. Following a reorganisation of the Society of Benevolence in 1825, they were merged into Colony II, named Wilhelminaoord. Westvierdeparten was incorporated in Colony III, Willemsoord

1823 Addition of a school and schoolmaster's house

1851 Building of a church

1860 Upscaling of agriculture, collectivisation of the plots

1865 Collective farm Hoeve de Dankbaarheid was built

1893 Rustoord I, home for elderly couples, was established

1904 Rustoord II, home for elderly singles was added

1934 Poor families no longer admitted, start of partial privatisation

Evolution of the landscape

BEFORE

The north-eastern part of the Westerbeeksloot estate with some roads, surrounded by a large area of heathland. A strip of lower pasture areas next to already cultivated farmland of neighbouring communities.

PHASE 1 — 1820-1859

CREATION OF LANDSCAPE LAYER α¹

Creation of a new small-scale Colony landscape with smallholder farms.

Wilhelminaoord was established in 1820 on the grounds of the Westerbeeksloot estate and the Vierdeparten area.

This area continued the pattern in Frederiksoord, though with slightly larger plots and, consequently, slightly greater distances (120 metres) between Colony houses. There were about 62 standard Colony houses and supervisors' Colony houses situated along three lanes planted with trees.

It was here that in 1819 a cemetery was constructed. An 'Apostle' beech (i.e. several saplings in one hole) was planted, and a weeping beech also survives.

A school and a schoolmaster's house were built in 1823 and the church in 1851.

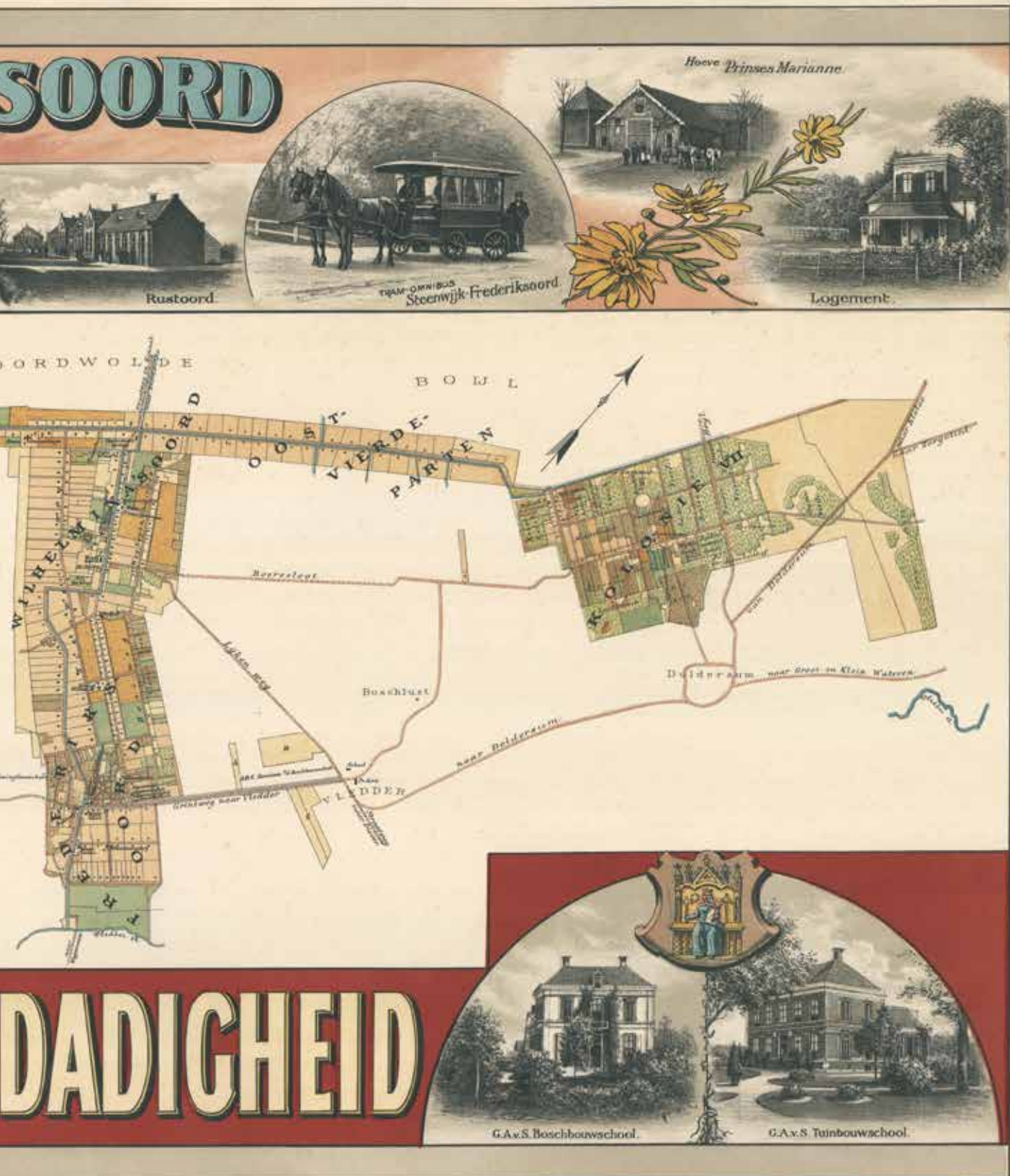
In 1821/1822, Oostvierdeparten and Westvierdeparten were cultivated and parcelled. They consist of a narrow central road with a length of approximately ten kilometres, with around 100 Colony farms on either side. The main part of Vierdeparten is situated in the province of Friesland, and connects the free Colonies of Willemsoord (1820) and Boschoord (1822). In the east, Boschoord was set up as an agricultural colony on higher (poor) sandy soils.



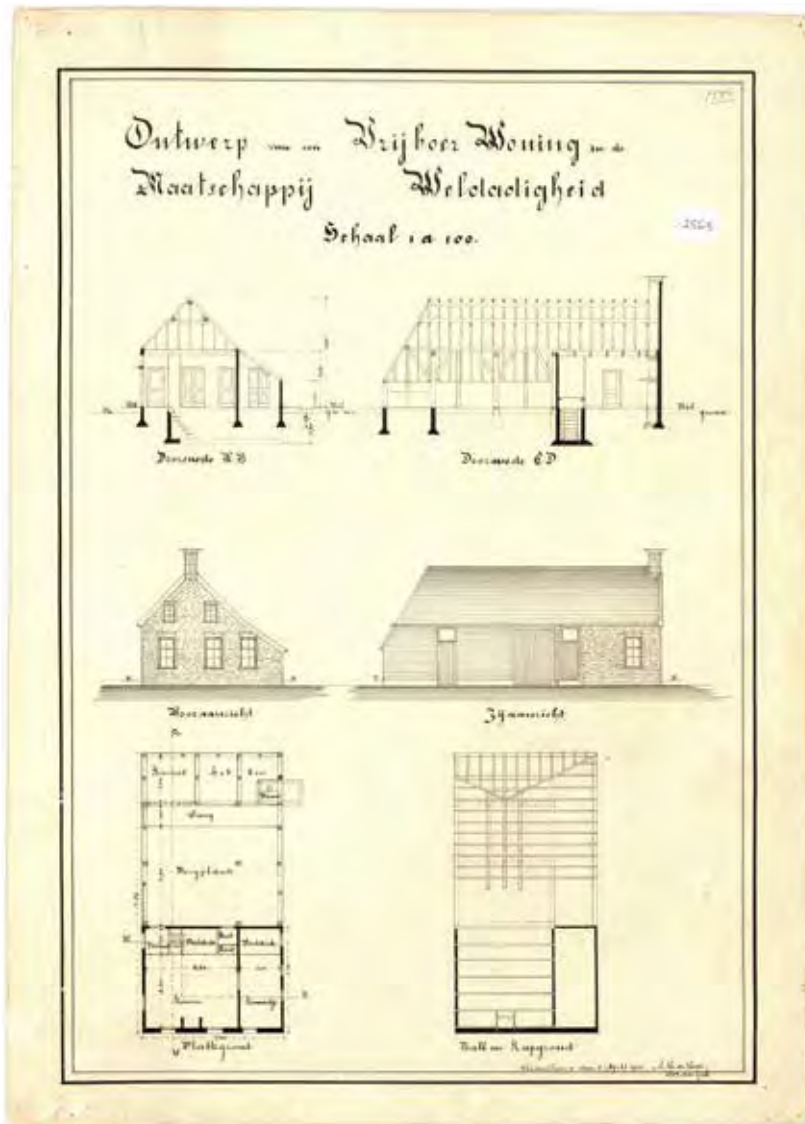
Plattegrond

VAN DE **MAATSCHAPPIJ** VAN WEL

↓
Poster of the free Colonies
I, II and III, late 19th century
(M.v.W.)



↓
The design of a freeholder farm,
around 1901 (M.v.W.)



This failed, despite innovative techniques to make the soil fertile (e.g. green manure through broom cultivation), after which it was decided to convert the area to a production forest. In 1823, the Agricultural Institute was built north of Wateren. For this purpose yet another 500 hectares of land were cultivated and put into operation as pasture for cattle breeding. The Institute at Wateren and the surrounding land were sold to the State in 1859.

PHASE 2 — 1860-1918 ADDITION OF LANDSCAPE LAYER α^2

Addition of large collective farms and extra education facilities within the existing landscape grid.

After 1859 some small plots were collectivized, as in Frederiksoord, and around 1865 a large farm was built with a hexagonal wooden barn. Around 1910 the farm burned down (except for the barn, which still exists). It was rebuilt in 1913 with anonymous funding, which later turned out to have come from Princess Marianne. Rustoord, the first home for elderly couples, opened in 1893 and was extended two years later. In 1904 Rustoord II opened, a home for elderly singles. From 1898, the steam powered dairy factory Deli in Wilhelminaoord processed the milk from 700 Colony cows.

At the beginning of the 20th century a second large farm, a so-called 'freeholder farm' where a promoted former colonist was in charge of running the farm business, was built at the M.A. van Naamen van Eemneslaan.



PHASE 3 — 1918-NOW

Change of scope of the Society of Benevolence, privatisation and evolution into ordinary village

After 1934 new colonists were no longer admitted to the Colony. The area became gradually privatised and evolved into a normal village. However, agriculture remains a dominant activity in the area.

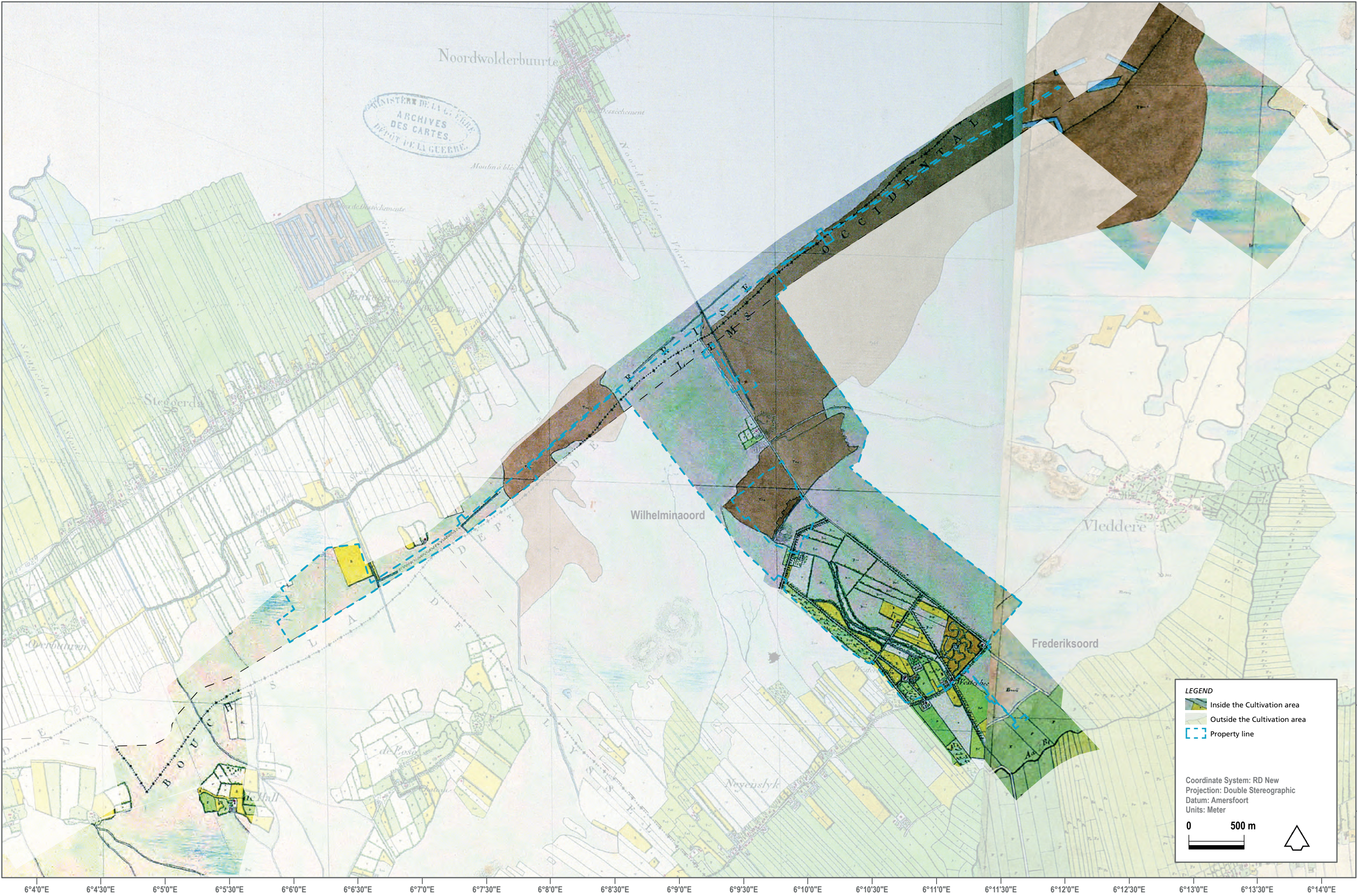
After the construction of a new home for the elderly, the Rustoord II building was converted into Buitencentrum Wilhelminaord, property of the municipality of The Hague.

The simple little brick church with its small tower, in use by the Dutch Reformed church until 2009, nowadays accommodates festive and cultural events. Until the dissolution of the church function, the 1912 rectory adjacent to the church was the vicar's home.

In 2013 a cubicle barn was added to Hoeve Prinses Marianne. The barn has been carefully integrated into the landscape and is exemplary for appropriate renovation in line with heritage values.

The former school with schoolmaster's house in Wilhelminaord, built in 1821, is a double house now. The basketry/weaving mill/forging on the Wilhelminalaan offered the required alternative employment to colonists who were unfit for hard agricultural labour. The building was recently (2018) converted into adapted housing facilities for people with autism.

↑
Dutch reformed church with rectory in Wilhelminaord (J.v.L.)

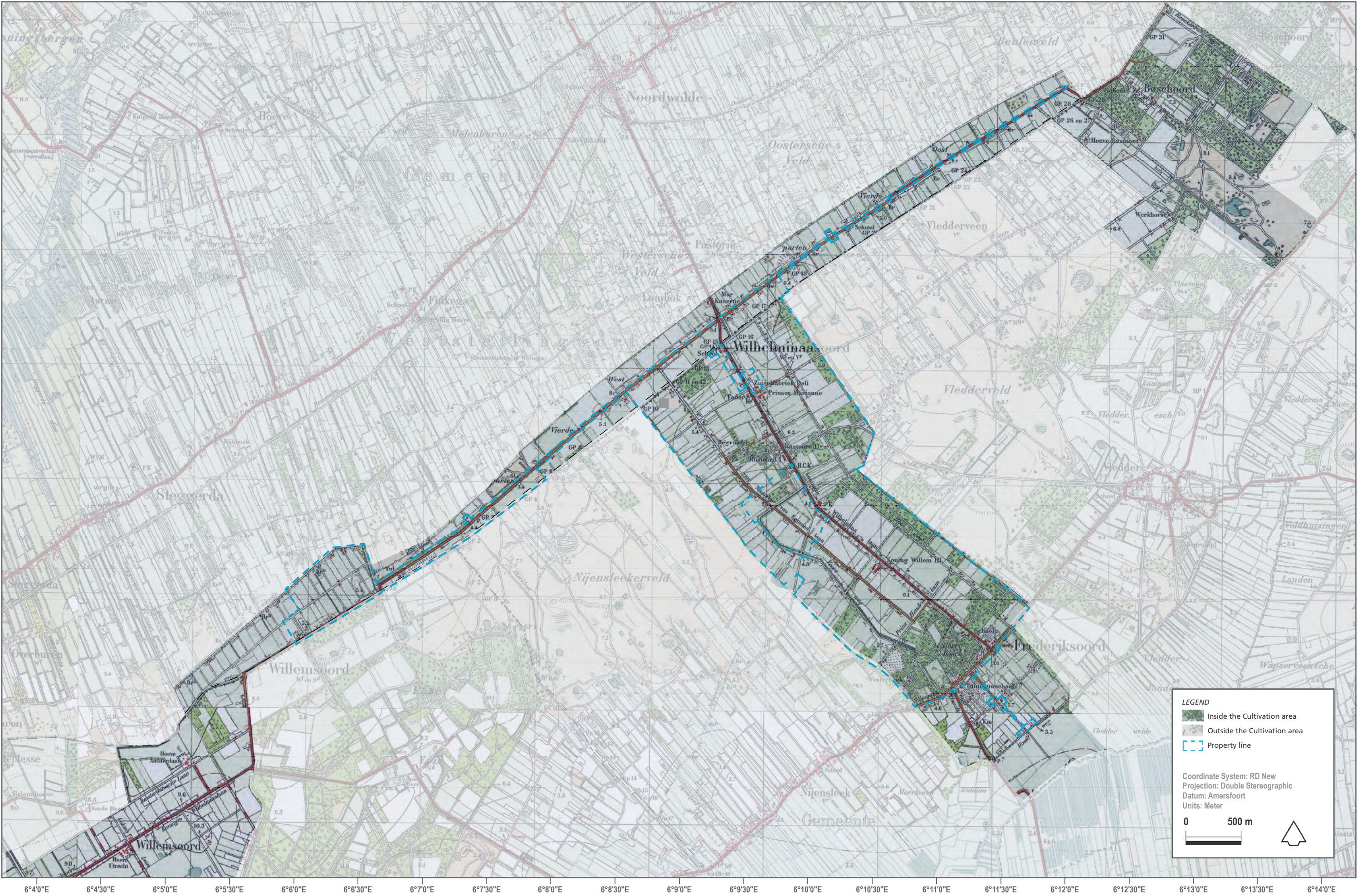


COMPONENT PART A: FREDERIKSOORD-WILHELMINA OORD

1:30.000



M2.9 DESCRIPTION: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT BEFORE 1860-1918
COMPONENT PART A: FREDRIKSOORD-WILHELMINAORD
1:30.000





WILLEMSOORD (COLONY III)

Milestones

1820	Start of Colony of Willemsoord
1851	Building of Dutch Reformed church
1860	Upscaling of agriculture, building of three large collective farms
1890	Establishment of a school for agriculture
1923	Decision to sell the Colony, start of privatisation



Guest house and coffee house in Willemsoord (A.S.)



Evolution of the landscape

BEFORE

In 1820 the Society of Benevolence purchased heathlands in Steenwijkerwold (Overijssel), 14 kilometres southwest of Frederiksoord. There Colony III (later Willemsoord) was realised, near the hamlet of De Hall.

A methodical organisation was possible here, because the existing infrastructure consisted of paths running through the heath.

PHASE 1 — 1820-1859

CREATION OF LANDSCAPE LAYER α¹

Creation of a new small-scale Colony landscape with smallholder farms

This Colony was larger than the previous two, comprising 150 family farms. Towards the west there was an existing road running north-south, and at the intersection with one of the Colony's avenues a diamond-shaped space was formed surrounded by communal buildings: the deputy director's house, a spinning hall, a school with the teacher's house and a hostelry. In 1851 a Dutch Reformed church, very similar to the one in Wilhelminaoord, was built close to the crossroads. Its rectory was added in 1868. East of the crossroads it was attempted to achieve a layout of parallel lanes; this was not really successful, because of the shape of the property.

Jewish colonists were accommodated by the Society of Benevolence on the grounds of the former De Pol estate, known as the Jewish quarter. Initially, De Pol was not part of Willemsoord, but was brought under cultivation somewhat later. In 1831, there were enough Jewish men living there to start their own community. Until 1876, there was an active synagogue with a classroom, a cemetery and a bathhouse.

PHASE 2 — 1860-1918

ADDITION OF LANDSCAPE LAYER α^2

Addition of large collective farms and extra education facilities within the existing landscape grid

After 1860 much of the land was collectivised, as in the two previous Colonies, and three collective farms were built. One was located south of the church (General van den Bosch Farm), a second on the central easterly avenue and the third, Hoeve Amsterdam, replaced 16 family farms on the northern easterly avenue. Soon afterwards, a railway was constructed parallel to the old road. In 1890, a school of agriculture was established which lasted only a short period of time.

The Colony retained its general form until it was decided in 1923 to gradually sell it. From that time onwards, the trees started disappearing and changes and new construction by purchasers resulted in the core of the settlement around the crossroads becoming indistinguishable from an ordinary suburb. On the easterly avenues, the earlier pattern can be discerned from the air, but alterations and new buildings make it hard to perceive at ground level. By mid-20th century, the Colony houses to the north had already disappeared, as had many of those to the south. On one short section of Lohnislaan several Colony houses have survived.

↓
Orthogonal structure with
avenue planting and Colony
houses (J.v.L.)

↓
Jewish cemetery (J.v.L.)

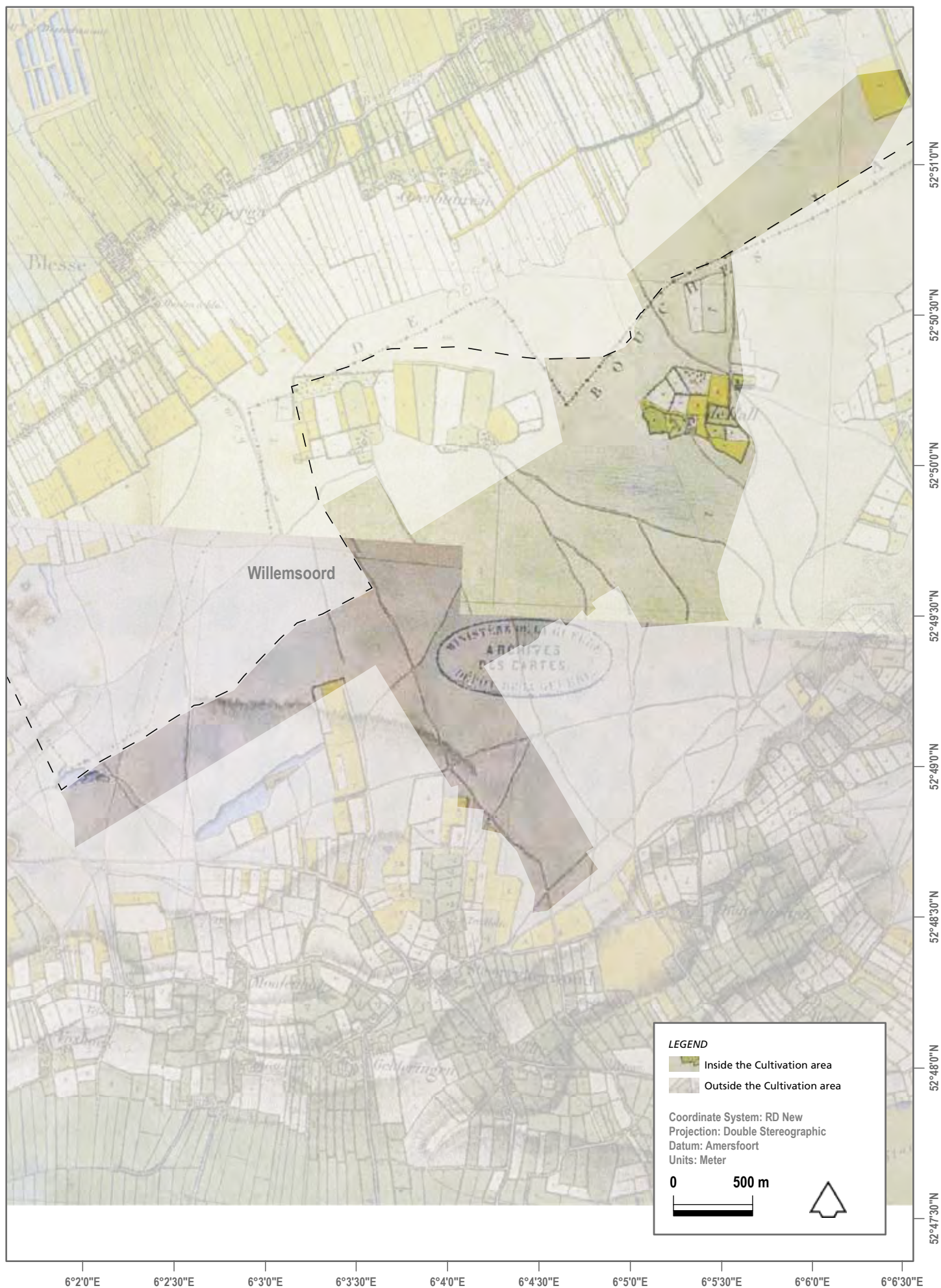
↓
Protestant church (1851) and
Rectory (J.v.L.)

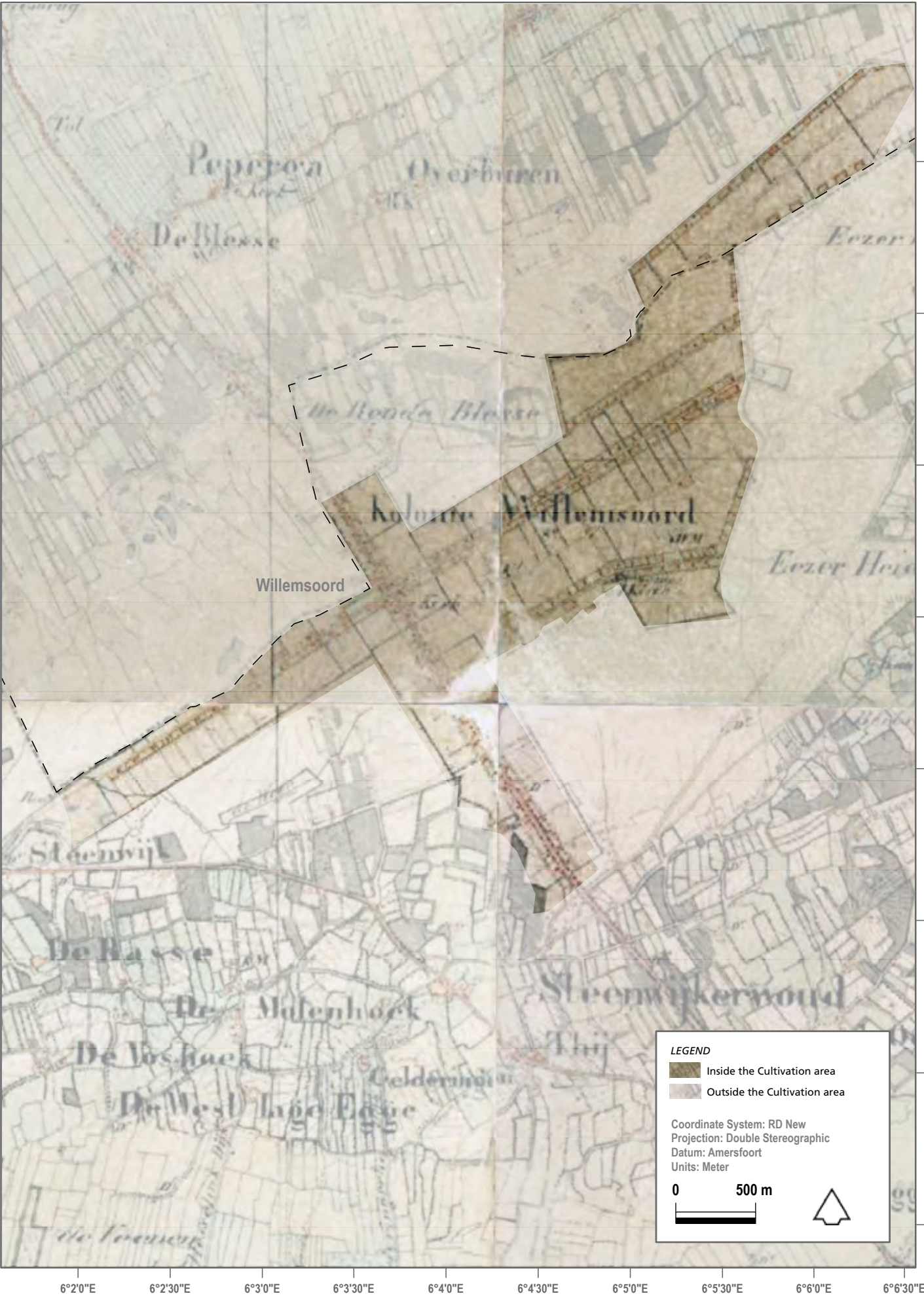


M2.11 DESCRIPTION: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT BEFORE 1820

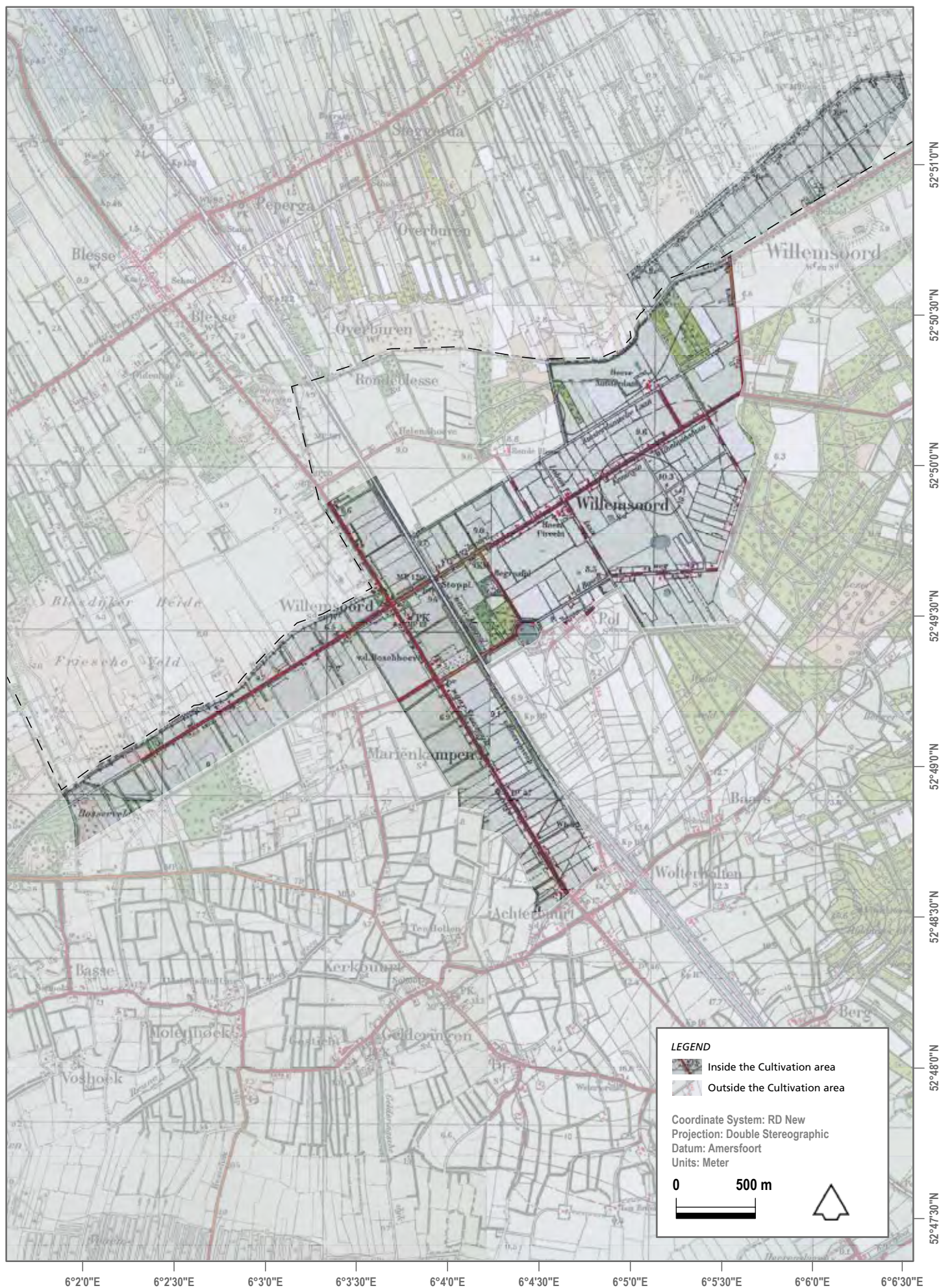
COLONY III: WILLEMSOORD

1:30.000





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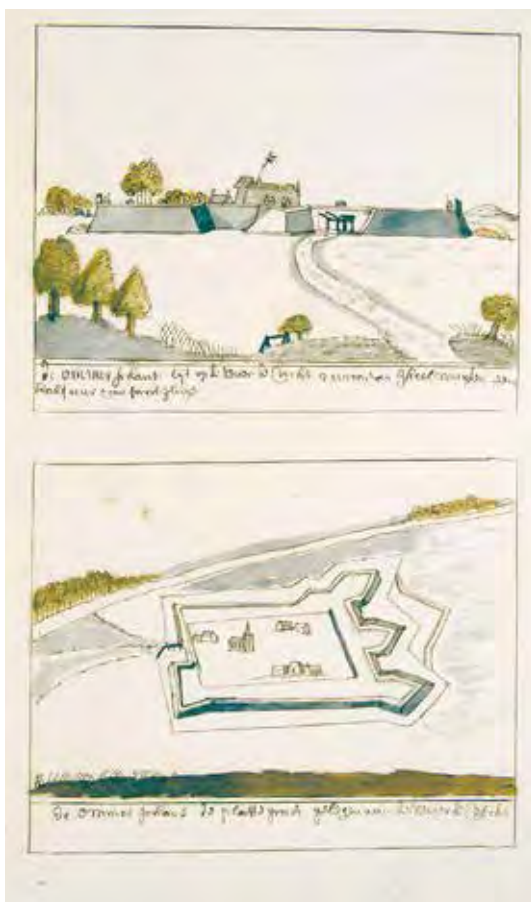


M2.14 DESCRIPTION: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT ACTUAL SITUATION
COLONY III: WILLEMSOORD
1:30.000





Ommerschans is located on the river Vlecht, C. Pronk, early 18th century (H.V.O.)



Evolution of the landscape

BEFORE

In the Ommersche Veld, a vast heathland area south of the river Reest and north of the municipality of Ommen, the 17th-century fortification Ommerschans was to be found. At the beginning of the 19th century, the fortress was one of the largest ammunition storage facilities in the Netherlands. Northwest of Ommerschans there was a cushion bog where peat was cut for fuel. The main entrance was situated east of the fortress: the north-south oriented road from Ommen to Meppel in Drenthe. As from 1811 Ommerschans and the surrounding area became more easily accessible, following the construction of the Dedemsvaart canal (1809-1811) north of Ommerschans for the large-scale transport of turf.

OMMERSCHANS (COLONY IV)

Milestones

1819	Start of the development of an unfree Colony within the existing remains of a former military retreat
1859	Takeover by the Dutch government, further development under the management of the Ministry of the Interior
1875	Switch to the Ministry of Justice
1889	Vagrants are moved to Veenhuizen, the institution becomes obsolete
1893	Start of major construction programme led by W.C. Metzelaar: institution Veldzicht for boys, staff housing and several other buildings. Part of the farms are privatised
1908	The old institution is demolished
1933	Veldzicht becomes an institution for the criminally insane

PHASE 1 — 1819-1859

CREATION OF LANDSCAPE LAYER β^1

Creation of a new-large scale Colony landscape with an institution and large collective farms

The Society's first central institution for beggars and vagrants was placed within a moat, itself within the ramparts and outer moat of a disused military fort.

The large institution was intended to accommodate 1,000 inhabitants. At the time, with its dimensions of 100 by 100 metres, it was considered to be the largest building in the country. It had blind exterior walls, so that it was oriented entirely towards a central courtyard. A small wall divided this yard in men's and women's quarters. The different wings comprised thirty dormitories for forty 'colons', or inhabitants, each with a supervisor's facility in between. In the daytime area a spinning hall, a weaving mill, a warehouse and the staff rooms were to be found.

Twenty-one large farms were realised on the surrounding peatlands to employ the inmates.

Soon afterwards, in 1845, a Dutch Reformed church, also used for Catholic services, and a primary school were built nearby to the north. The director's house was also to be found in that direction, albeit somewhat further away. The cemetery was situated just outside the fort's southern moat.

PHASE 2 — 1860-1918

ADDITION OF LANDSCAPE LAYER β^2

Addition of staff housing, institutions and production buildings within the existing landscape grid

In 1859 the Dutch state took over the unfree Colonies and initiated a new building programme. Drastic changes in the building stock in Ommerschans occurred around that time.

An operation to upscale the farms was started, and the 1820s farm buildings were demolished in the 1870s, with the exception of two buildings at the far western end. By 1874 the buildings had been replaced by around ten new ones at the same locations, under the supervision of engineer W. Leemans. The new buildings were located relatively close to the labour force in the institution, and were fitted with large barns with integrated farmers' houses; a fine example was 'Farm no. 4', south of the fort. The farmer was responsible for the supervision on the agricultural work.

Ommerschans was a huge building with no outward facing windows, and its punitive regime had earned it a bad reputation. In 1889, the beggars were transferred to Veenhuizen, following which many of the farms were auctioned off to private farmers. At this time there were already plans for a new state institution for the re-education of boys with behavioural problems. This institution, which was given the positive-sounding name Veldzicht (Field View), was erected in the period 1892-1894 within the moat, situated well away to the north. The regime focused mainly on



agricultural and horticultural education, and much of the time the boys were out in the fields for learning purposes. Therefore, a new farm was built just north of the fort in 1909, and Farm no. 4 was retained as a dairy farm. A new director's house (Villa Erica) was built in 1894, with one side of the moat exhibited in the view like a garden canal. Staff housing followed in the years 1892-1920, close to Balkbrug, the settlement to the north that had developed alongside a canal. The old institution was demolished in 1908.

PHASE 3 — 1918 - NOW

Change of scope, evolution into psychiatric institution and privatisation

From 1933 Veldzicht was an institution for the care of the criminally insane, who were not required to work in the fields. The institutional buildings have since been adapted many times. The remains of the retreat are owned by Staatsbosbeheer (National Forestry Commission), and the nearby farm dating from 1909 is still owned by the State. The main building, dating from 1894, remained situated inside the moat, but the interior was renovated. Currently, Veldzicht is a Centre for Transcultural Psychiatry.

↑
View of the Institution for
beggars in Ommerschans,
J. Van Genk, 1827 (R.A.)

→ Veldzicht (1894) was built by architect W.C. Metzelaar (J.v.L.)

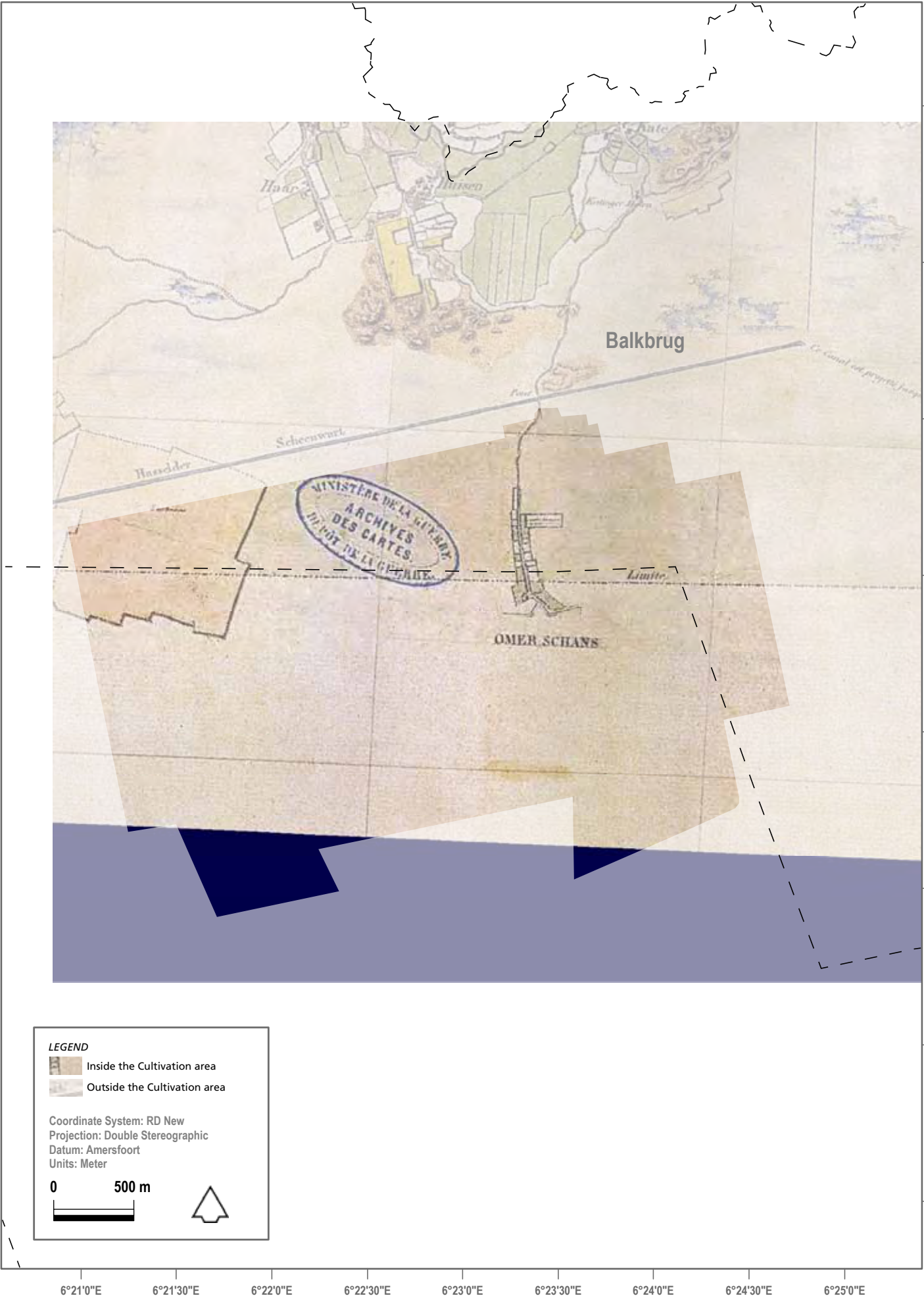
↓ Re-education Institution Veldzicht (D.A.)



Meanwhile the farms sold in 1889/1890 have mostly been replaced or adapted, and are situated amongst extensive ancillary buildings, whilst many new farm complexes have arisen. The drainage ditches appear to have been largely modified.

The orthogonal grid of avenues remains largely intact, although the trees have mostly disappeared. In the 20th century much of the staff housing was transferred to private ownership and is now integrated in the expanding village of Balkbrug.

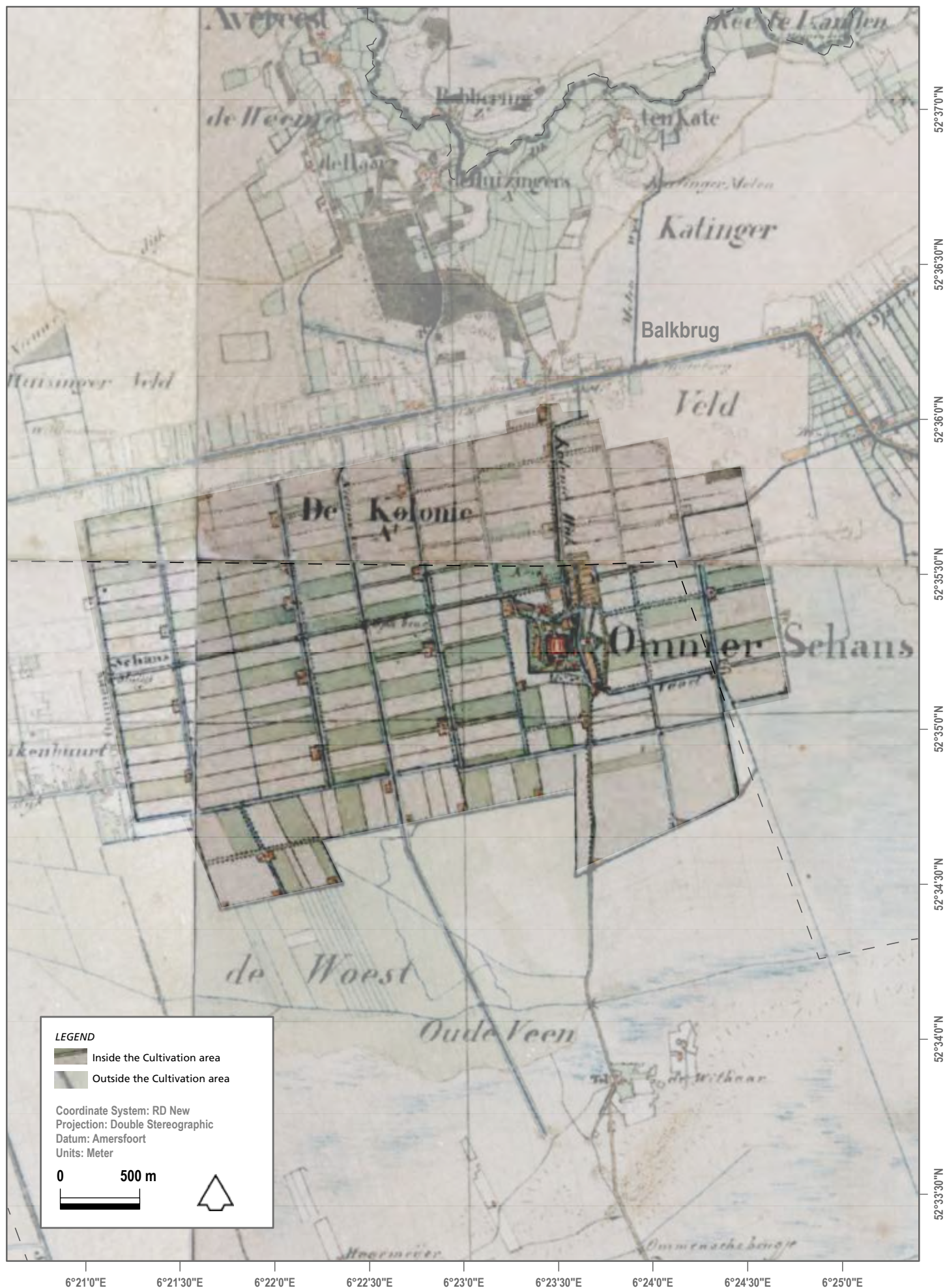
In Ommerschans agriculture also remains the main economic driving force. All the agricultural enterprises and staff housing were sold by the State to private owners and in 2015 a number of structures, including the moat, were restored. The Forestry Commission and the Association Ommerschans are cooperating on projects to preserve the heritage and make it accessible.



M2.16 DESCRIPTION: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT 1820 -1859

COLONY IV: OMMERSCHANS

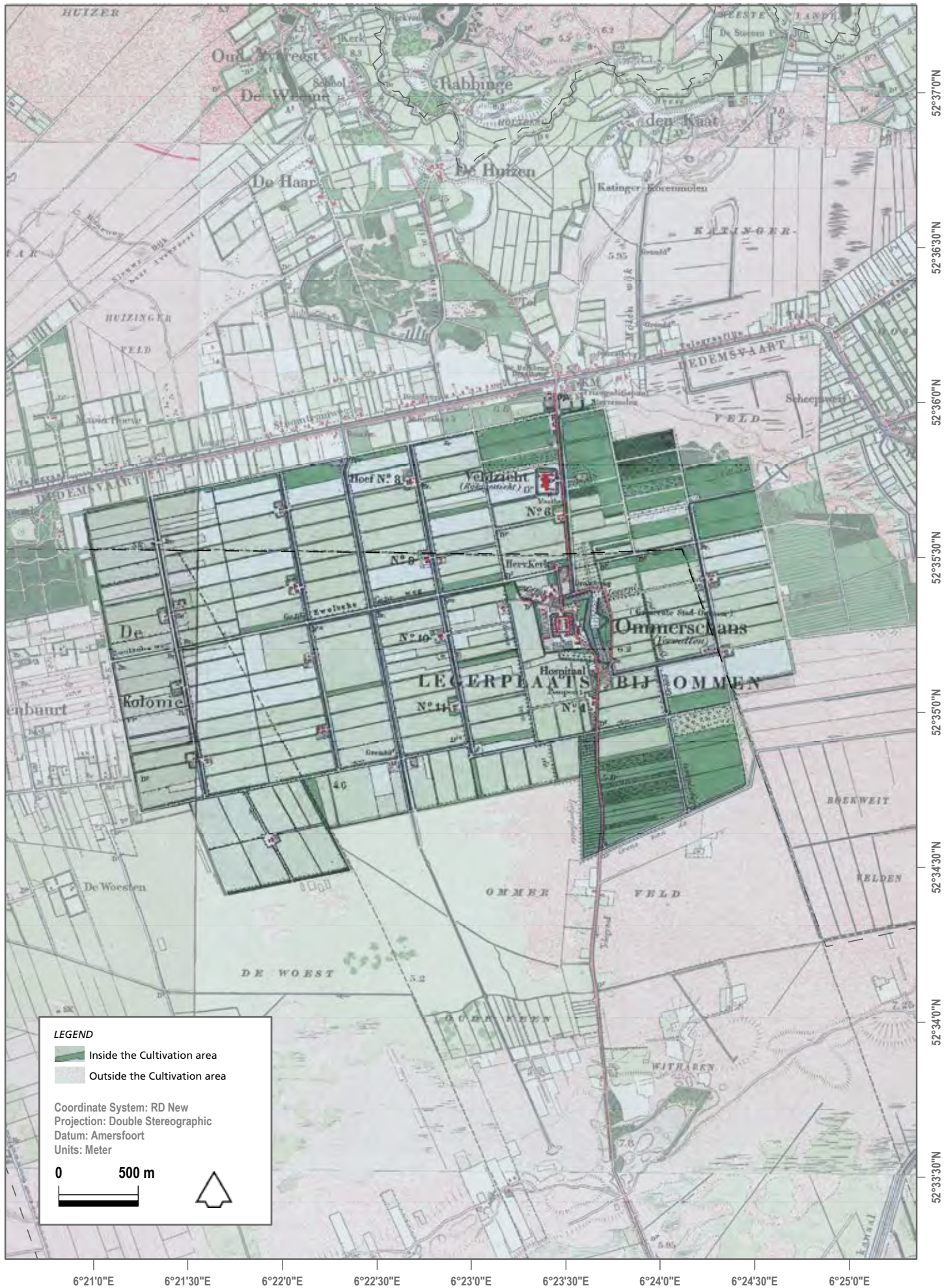
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M2.17 DESCRIPTION: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT 1860-1918

COLONY IV: OMMERSCHANS

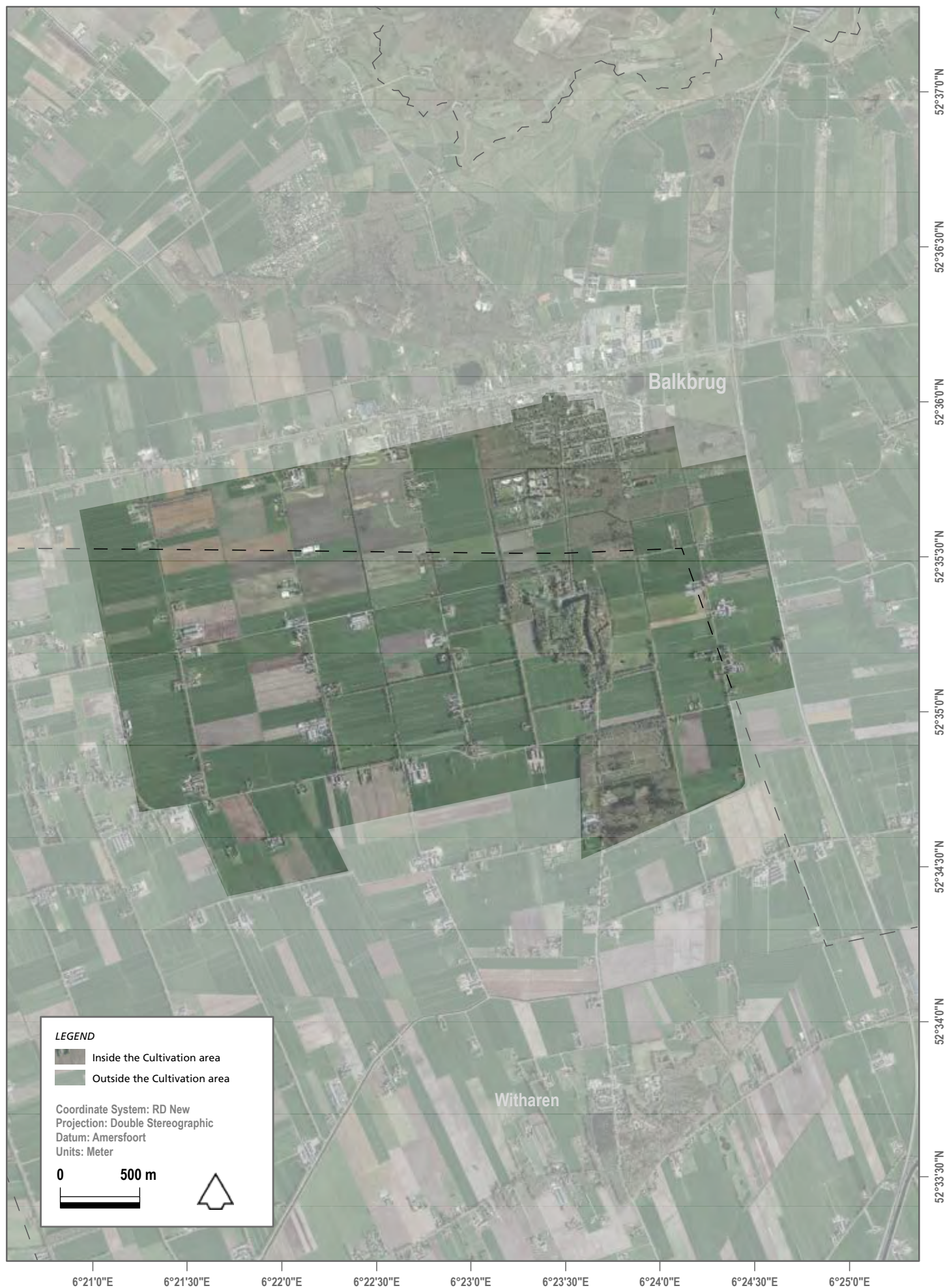
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M2.18 DESCRIPTION: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT ACTUAL SITUATION

COLONY IV: OMMERSCHANS

1:30.000



WORTEL (COLONY V)

Milestones

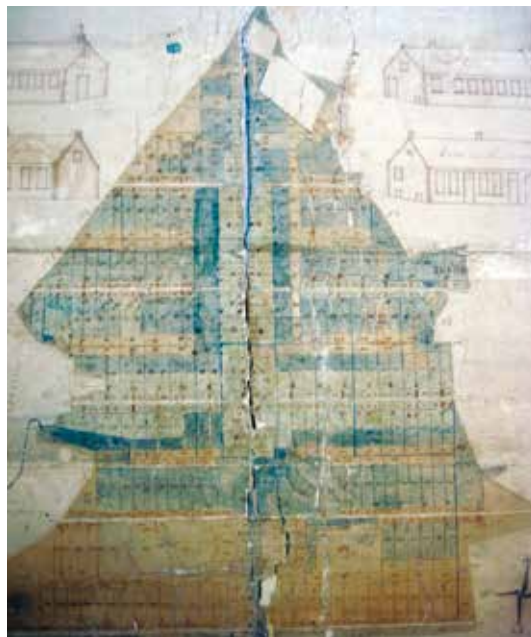
1822	Start of a free Colony in the Southern part of the Kingdom
1830	Independence of Belgium
1842	Bankruptcy of Southern Society of Benevolence
1866	Act for the repression of begging and vagrancy
1870	Acquisition of Wortel Colony by the Belgian State, start of Building Programme
1891	Act Lejeune
1945	War damage
1993	Abolition of the Act Lejeune, Wortel Colony becomes a prison

Evolution of the landscape

BEFORE

East of the village of Wortel, in the Belgian city of Hoogstraten, a vast and varied heathland area (the Bolkse Heide) was to be found with large fens and scattered forest plots. To the south of the area the river Merck meandered, bordered by pastures and hayfields. Inhabitants from surrounding residential areas made common use of the heath for grazing sheep and peat extraction in the wetter areas.

A number of east-west oriented dirt roads traversed the heath and connected small hamlets and isolated farms like Heykant with the larger municipality of Wortel and the city of Hoogstraten.



← Overview map with plot layout and outline of central buildings in Wortel (A.R.B.)

Ergo, enough lands for cultivation, plus good clay soil for the manufacture of bricks. A further decisive factor was the proximity of the beggars' institution in the city of Hoogstraten (established since 1809), because this meant easy access to cheap labour. Only afterwards the drawbacks of the location became apparent: the remote location, absence of infrastructure, infertile soils and the lack of manure in the vicinity.

PHASE 1 — 1822-1859

CREATION OF LANDSCAPE LAYER α¹

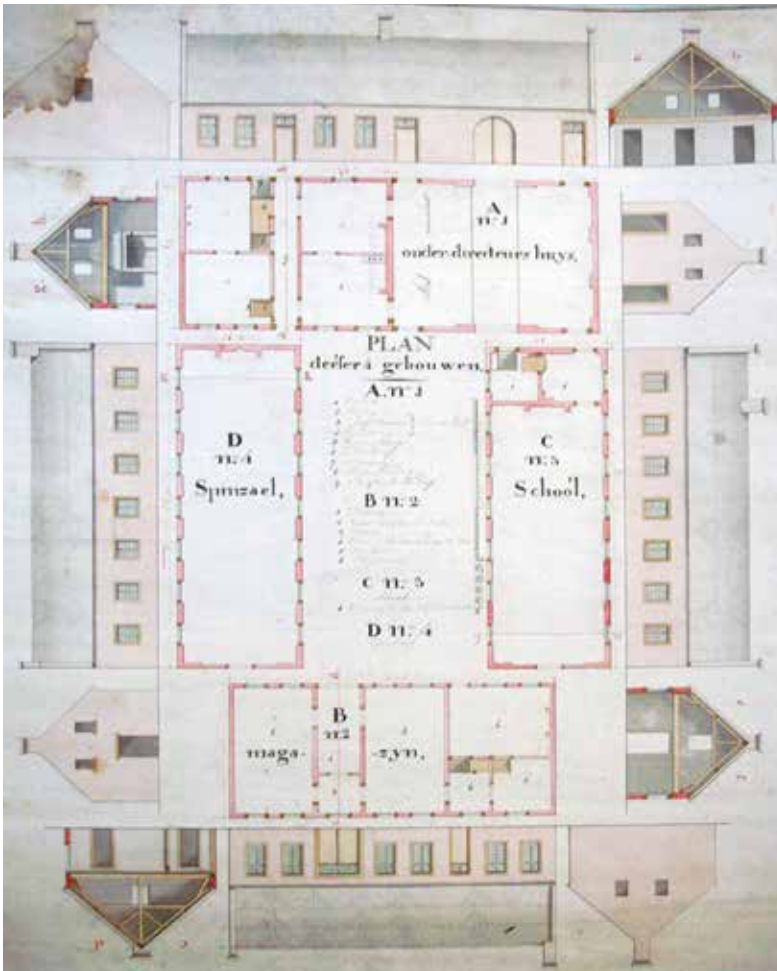
Creation of a new small-scale Colony landscape with smallholder farms

In 1822 work was started to create a free Colony in Wortel (Colony V).

With regard to the structure of this Colony, experiences gained in Frederiksoord and Willemsoord were taken into account and adapted to local conditions. In the National Archives in Brussels, drawings and written

↓
View of Wortel crossroads a
feature dating from the period
as 'free' Colony (K.V.)

↓
Design of the 4 buildings at the
central crossroads in Wortel,
around 1822 (A.R.B.)



documents of the Dutch Colonies can be found which were sent to the Southern Netherlands to serve as examples, with suggestions for improvements.

The similarity to the structure of the free Colony of Willemsoord, much acclaimed by Van den Bosch, is obvious. Two lithographs from 1822 provide a clear picture of the methodical structure and the layout of the model farms. In October 1822, the first 24 families took up residence here.

The establishment of the new organisation caused a profound change in these heathlands. The area was divided by symmetrical farm ribbons and into equal plots. As in the Colonies in the Northern Netherlands, the farms built in Wortel – as many as 129 – were small, with 3.5 hectares of land each. Four centrally situated buildings, a spinning hall, a school/church, a director's house and a warehouse were arranged around a diamond-shaped junction of two main roads, subsequently denominated on topographic maps as *les quatre bâtiments*. A cemetery was established towards the north-west of the property.

In 1828, when the Colony was at its peak, reportedly only 180 hectares of arable land were in use.

Because of its fairly dry surface, Wortel had fewer 'wijken' than the Dutch Colonies: the Colony layout had an orthogonal block structure of avenues planted with poplars (*Populus*) and oaks (*Quercus robur*). The drainage of the plots took place via original bog streams and a number of canals.

After Belgian independence in 1830, the Southern Society of Benevolence from 1839 onwards no longer received extra financial support from the government, and other funding sources had dried up. From the start, there had been many problems in the South: municipalities and provinces, for example, refused to send their poor because it was cheaper to billet them with farmers. In addition, the colonists were inexperienced and showed no interest in farming. Financial irregularities occurred, and the progressive national approach of the Dutch in the North was regarded with contempt.

In 1842, Wortel Colony was dissolved. In the decades which followed, the small farms were systematically demolished in order to be able to restore other buildings with the building materials.

PHASE 2 — 1860-1918

ADDITION OF LANDSCAPE LAYER β^2

Addition of staff housing, institution and production buildings within the existing landscape grid

Following the Act for the repression of begging and vagrancy (1866) Wortel Colony was acquired by the Belgian State and made a new start in 1870 as 'State Agricultural Colony of Benevolence'. It underwent a major change in order to make the site suitable as an unfree Colony. Close to the central crossroads, a large-scale building complex was added with dormitories, workshops, a chapel and service premises around a rectangular courtyard.

An increase in the scale of agriculture occurred: one large farm was constructed for the whole area, located at the central crossroads, next to a barracks, an inn and a school. For all these buildings – to replace the four central buildings from the days of the Society of Benevolence – the characteristic slanted arrangement at the crossroads was preserved.

Here, too, a series of staff housing was added – with different typologies, depending on the position of the occupant. Finally, service buildings were spread across the site: a sheepfold, a field hospital for infectious diseases, a shed for garden supplies.

However, the original grid of the free Colony was preserved. The avenues were replanted with single and double rows of oaks (*Quercus robur*), beech and red oak to reinforce their hierarchy, and the plot boundaries of the buildings as well as the warders' houses were shielded by hornbeam hedges. The junction les quatre bâtiments was paved with cobblestones.



The quality of the soil was poor, and no attempt was made to farm the entire property. Rather, the core area of fields close to the farm was recovered as farmland, and the remaining, mostly peripheral, blocks were maintained as production forests and gradually planted up.

On the basis of Lejeune's 1891 Act – which made a distinction between professional beggars and those who had become beggars through bad luck or old age – Wortel specialised as a 'Refuge House' for those who through no fault of their own had been forced into begging.

↑
Old postcard of the central institution of Wortel (K.L.)

↑
After 1870 one large farm was constructed for the whole area of the Colony of Wortel (K.L.)

PHASE 3 — 1918 – NOW

Change of scope, partly evolution into prison and privatisation

During both the First and the Second World War, Wortel Colony was partially empty. First it was used by the German occupiers, and later by the Allied Forces, as a shelter and as a prison for prisoners-of-war or political prisoners. After the First World War, a much smaller number of vagrants ended up in the Colonies, as a result of improved social legislation and the need for reconstruction workers. This led to stretches of temporary (partial) lack of occupancy and function changes. Each time this would lead to adjustments and reconstruction, but largely within the existing buildings. Apart from the many function changes, the Second World War also led to considerable war damage in Wortel. The farm there was badly damaged – and only partially rebuilt. A number of houses too were demolished after they had incurred war damage.

In 1993, under European pressure, Belgium abolished the Vagrancy Act (also known as the Lejeune Act), which meant the elimination of Wortel Colony. The institution became a prison, which led to the modern post and wire security fences encircling it. In 1999 the whole Colony of Wortel was protected as cultural heritage landscape.

The State intended to sell the farms and forestry to the private market, but after protests Wortel became the shared property of public bodies such as the municipality of Hoogstraten, the Flemish Land Agency (VLM), the Agency for Nature and Forest (ANB), the Buildings Authority of the Federal Government (Regie der Gebouwen) and Kempens Landschap, a landscape organisation established at the initiative of the province of Antwerp. Kempens Landschap developed a management plan for the landscape, which redefined the management aims for the extensive woodland: its priority is now nature conservation rather than economic forestry.

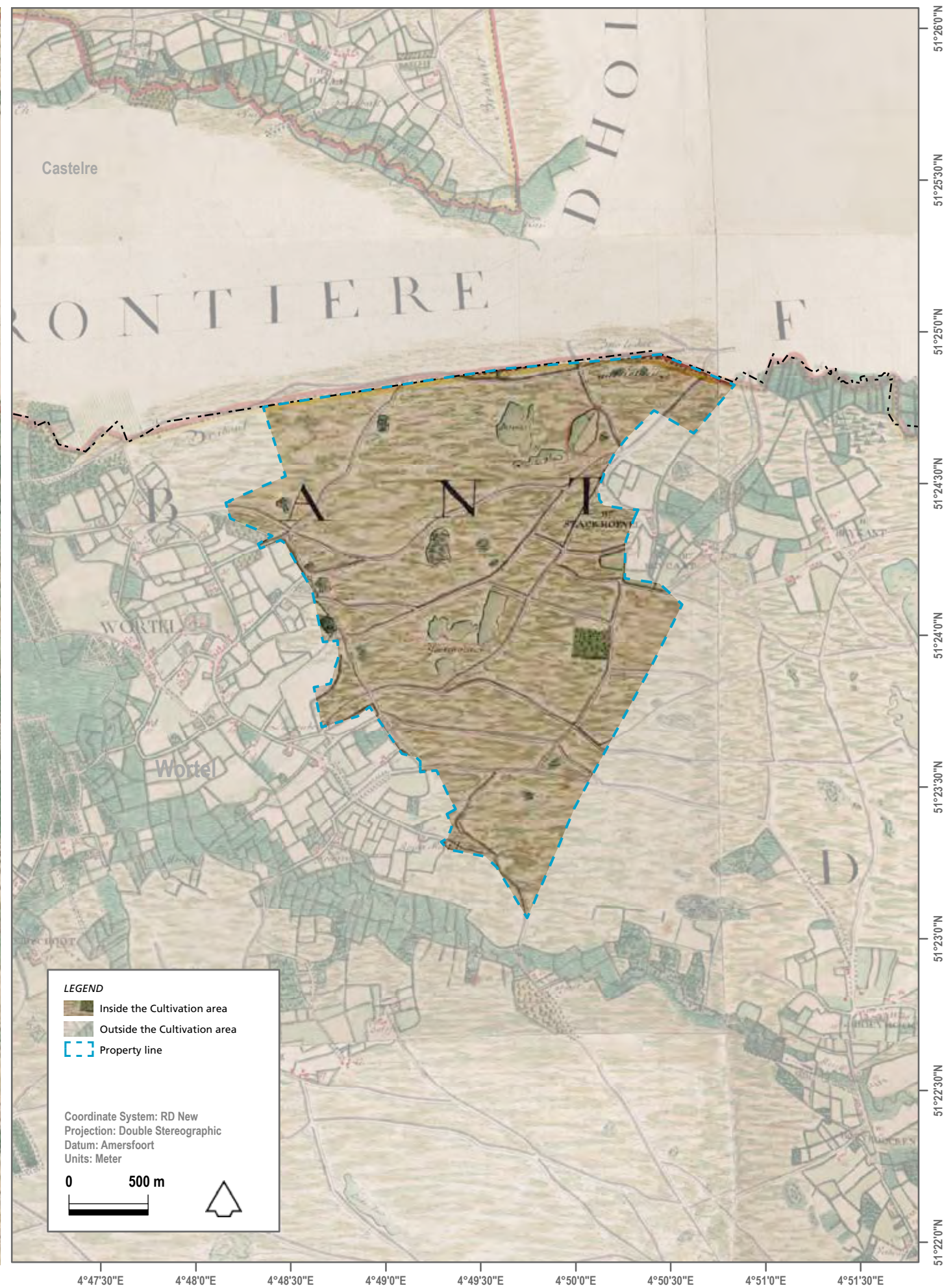


→ The original grid of the free Colony was preserved. The lanes were replanted with single and double rows of oaks (*Quercus robur*), beech and red oak to reinforce their hierarchy (L.P.)

M2.19 DESCRIPTION: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT BEFORE 1822

COMPONENT PART B: WORTEL

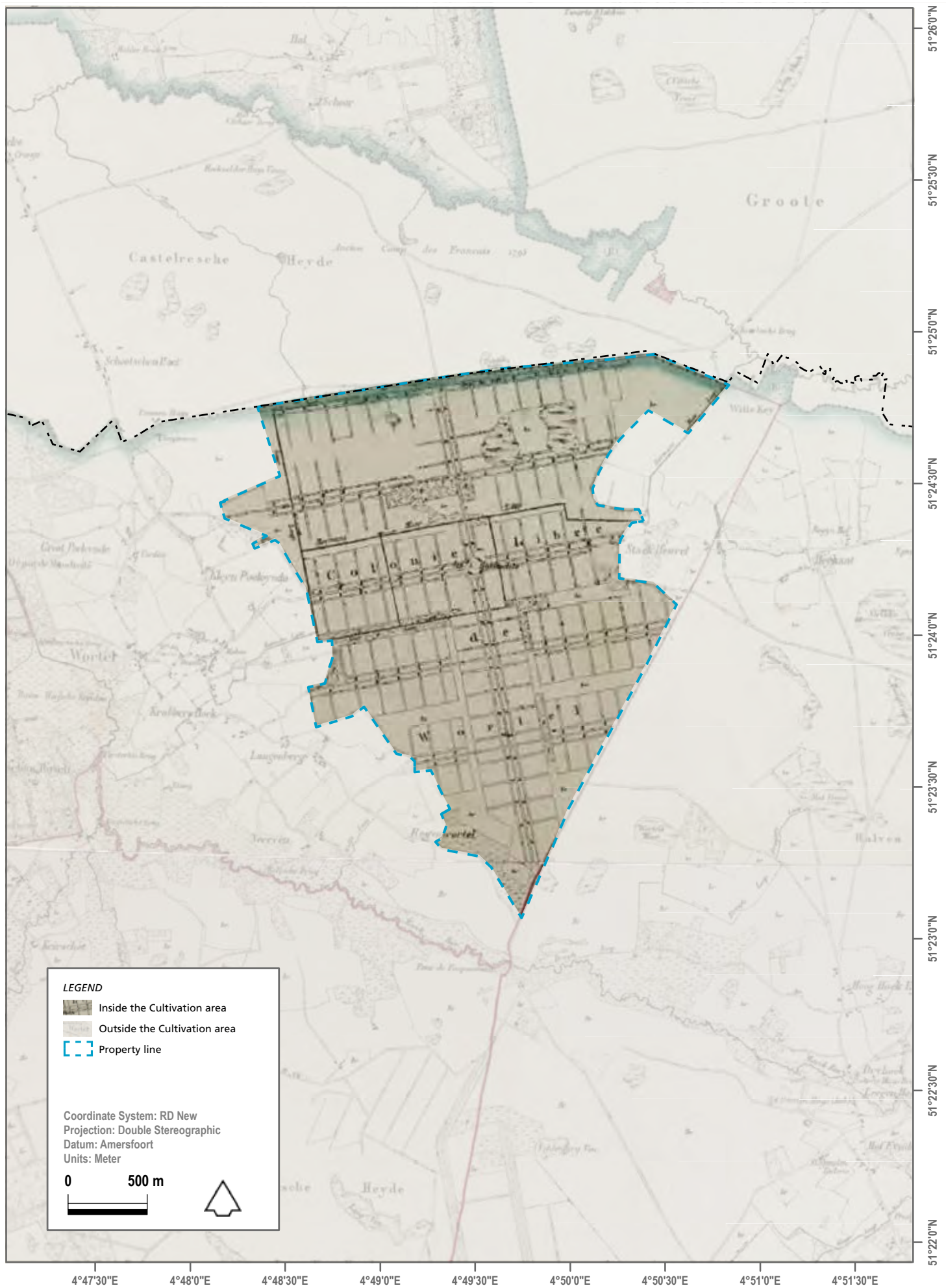
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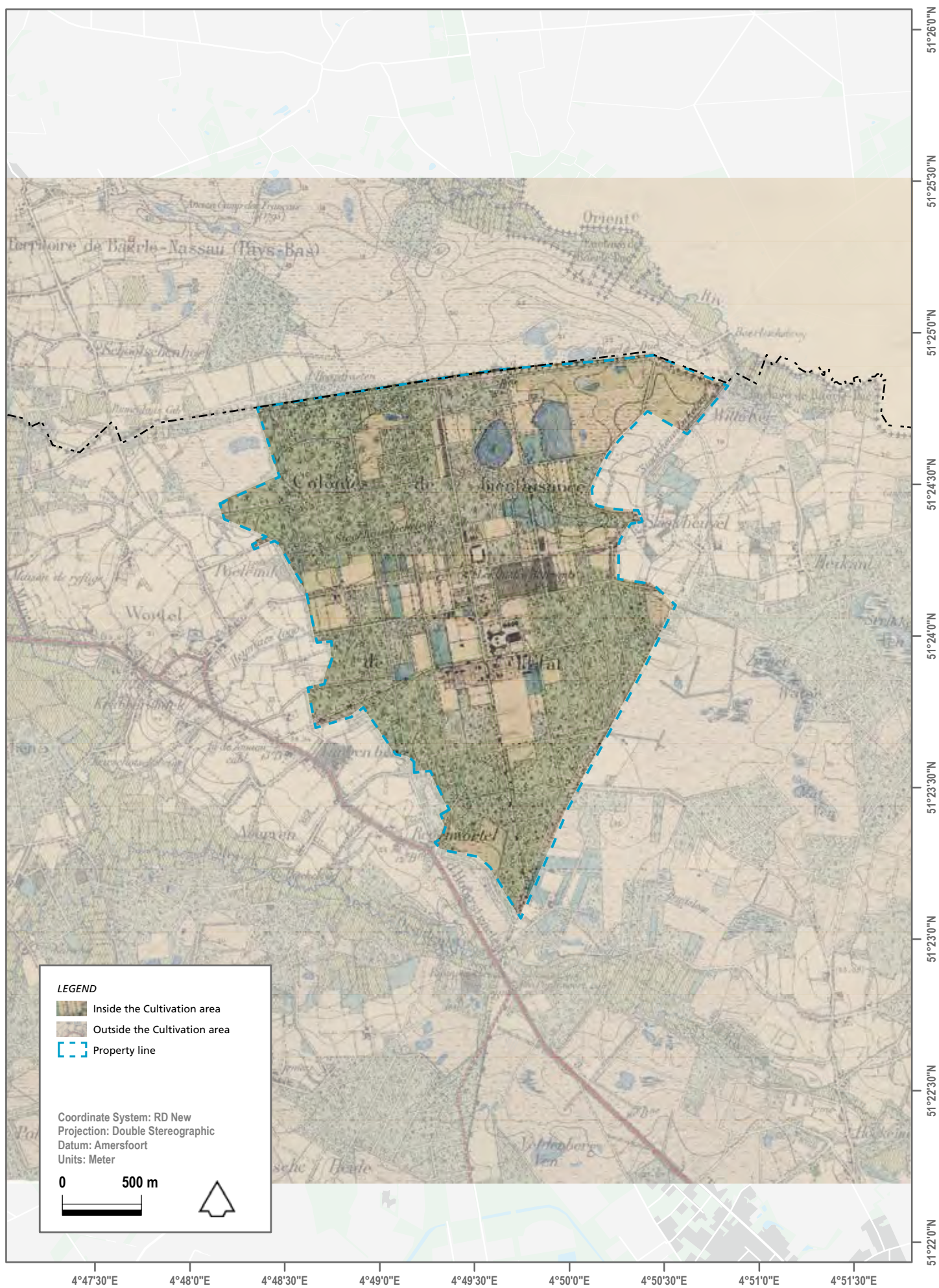
M2.20 DESCRIPTION: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT 1823-1859

COMPONENT PART B: WORTEL

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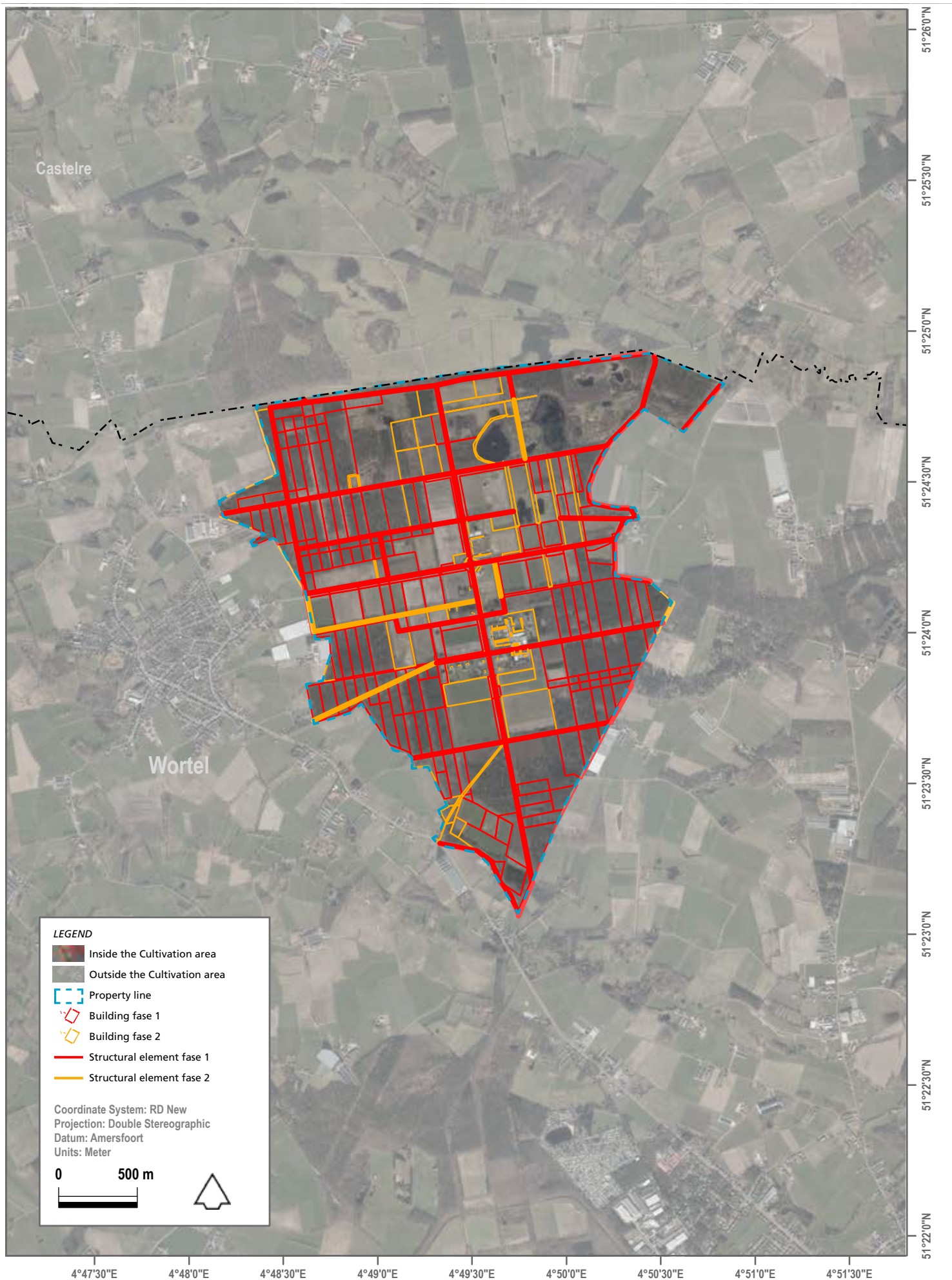
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M2.22 DESCRIPTION: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT ACTUAL SITUATION

COMPONENT PART B: WORTEL

1:30.000



VEENHUIZEN (COLONY VI)

Milestones

1823	Start of the development of an unfree Colony with institutions for orphans and vagrants
1859	Takeover by the Dutch government, further development under the management of the Ministry of the Interior
1869	Discontinuation of the care for abandoned children and orphans; as from that time, only male beggars were admitted to the Colony
1875	Switch to the Ministry of Justice. Start of major construction programme on the site, led by J. F. Metzelaar, the chief architect of the Judiciary, and his son W.C. Metzelaar in his function of Chief Engineer-Architect for the Judiciary
1884	The Colony became a State labour institution for 'persons convicted of secondary offences' (such as begging and vagrancy), and new standards were introduced for the housing of staff, followed by an extensive building programme under supervision of W.C. Metzelaar
1918	Amendment of the law, arrival of the first prisoners and a diminishing number of colonists
1953	The gradual switch to a closed, almost autarkic 'prison village' was completed
1980s	The institutions ceased to be agricultural colonies, farm buildings were sold and large areas of land put in leasehold; Klein Soestdijk was also sold, the prison village was opened up. Start of a major conservation programme for buildings that had fallen into disuse and were in poor condition.

The judicial institutions remain the driving forces of the economy of the village and still run two prisons in the area. Over the past 25 years, some 60 million euros were invested in the area. The current programme is called 'Working on the Future of Veenhuizen'.

2005	Opening of the Prison Museum; in 2018 partial refurbishment to improve the presentation of the Colonies of Benevolence
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Evolution of the landscape

BEFORE

Because of the raised bogs and wet heath, the landscape around Veenhuizen was not easily accessible and the area was sparsely populated. It was used by inhabitants of the surrounding hamlets to graze sheep, cut turf and grow buckwheat.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Veenhuizen comprised six farms. The farms were surrounded by fields and orchards, and in the river valley hay meadows and pastures were to be found. Via dirt roads and paths, Veenhuizen was connected with Norg, Westervelde and Een, a little bit further north.

PHASE 1 — 1823-1859

CREATION OF LANDSCAPE LAYER β¹

Creation of a new-large scale Colony landscape with institutions and large collective farms

The hamlet of Veenhuizen was purchased in 1822. The peat bog here ('Veenhuizen' means 'houses on the peat bog') was drained by narrow canals, wide enough for small barges, and set out in an orthogonal grid of avenues. The Kolonievvaart canal runs along the southern edge of the Colony above six of these narrow canals.

↓
The First Institution in
Veenhuizen, 1826-1827 (R.L.)

↓
Second Institution in
Veenhuizen, 1826-1827 (R.L.)

↓
Third Institution in Veenhuizen,
1826-1827 (R.L.)



Between 1823 and 1825, three moated central institutions were built, each designed to serve eight large farms; 24 farms were anticipated, but 20 were actually built. The others were added later. Two of the institutions were intended for orphans, the third for beggars. The farms were situated along the ‘wijken’ (canals) and depended on these for their transport. The institution buildings were constructed with an inner and an outer shell, separated by a partition. Houses for workers’ families were situated in the outer shell of the buildings for orphans. The inner shell, oriented towards a large courtyard, contained halls for children.

The roads along the orthogonal ‘wijken’ and canals were planted with oak trees (*Quercus robur*).

An octagonal Dutch Reformed church was built near the Kolonievaart canal; a synagogue was built in 1839. A cemetery was laid out on the Eikenlaan, the northernmost of the avenues running in east-west direction across the full width of the property.

PHASE 2 — 1860-1918 ADDITION OF LANDSCAPE LAYER β^2

Addition of staff housing, institutions and production buildings within the existing landscape grid

In 1859 the State of the Netherlands took over the Colony of Veenhuizen, which meanwhile numbered 10,000 inhabitants, from the Society of Benevolence. Arable land was partially converted to pasture. The larger herds that consequently became possible led to higher fertiliser production. Moreover, the emphasis shifted partly from agriculture to the production of coniferous and deciduous wood, for example in the southern expansion area of Florisland. The avenues were planted with oaks (*Quercus robur*) as well as beeches (*Fagus sylvatica*). The State expanded the existing institutions and facilities, and added a large series of staff houses.

The new buildings were designed by the Ministry of Justice’s own architect, the Chief Engineer-



Edifying inscriptions on the staff houses in Veenhuizen. From top left to bottom right: *Ruimzicht* (Wide View), *Humaniteit* (Humanity), *Helpt Elkander* (Help One Another), *Opvoeding* (Education), *Levenslust* (Zest for Life), *Een van Zin* (Unity), *Kennis is Macht* (Knowledge is Power), *Werkzaamheid* (Efficacy),

Bitter en Zoet (Bitter and Sweet), *Arbeid is zegen* (Labour is Blessing), *Plichtgevoel* (Conscientiousness), *Toewijding* (Devotion), *Ontwikkeling* (Development) (J.v.L.)



In the foreground the octagonal Dutch Reform church with vicar's residence and in the background the former Roman Catholic church in Veenhuizen, 1827-1828 (B.R.L.)



Employee Hotel in Veenhuizen by architect W.C. Metzelaar (J.v.L.)

Architect of the Department of Justice. Until 1883 this position was held by J. F. Metzelaar sr. In 1886, he was succeeded by his son, W.C. Metzelaar (until 1914). Father and son Metzelaar left their mark on the second phase of the development of the Dutch Colonies of Benevolence, at a time when these were in use as a State institution. They translated the hierarchical panoptic system to the architecture. The ranks and positions of the staff were visualised in the building typology and also in the decoration of the buildings. There were seven types of houses, linked

to the function of the particular staff member. The office held and the morality were represented in the inscriptions.

Veenhuizen got its own director, for whom a luxurious villa was built on the road along the main canal. This villa was popularly called Klein Soestdijk (Small Soestdijk), after the royal palace Soestdijk in Baarn. The housing of the teachers of the Third Institution was improved. Also, a small hospital for the cure of infectious diseases (lepers building) was built.



As from 1879, the water system was connected with the Haulerwijk canal and other waterways in Friesland. Most of the transport still took place over water, but the use of the roads for transport also increased. To accommodate this, roads such as the Hoofdweg along the Kolonievaart were paved. Although the raised bog landscape around Veenhuizen had been increasingly engulfed by the adjacent peat cultivations at the villages of Smilde and Haulerwijk, Veenhuizen was still an autonomous and largely self-sufficient Colony in the heath and raised bog landscape.

Whereas until 1884 colonists had been living and working in the same buildings (institutions), these functions were subsequently separated. The existing institutions from the founding phase became workhouses, and new institutions for living in were built, where colonists continued to fall under a communal regime.

Norgerhaven was built on the location of institution 1, and Esserheem near institution 2. Institution 3 to the north-west of the property became gradually obsolete and was finally demolished in 1925.

In this phase a large number of staff houses, a hospital and pharmacy, a Roman Catholic church, a guard barracks, new farms, a slaughterhouse, a grain mill, a granary and a power plant were erected. Many of the buildings have mottoes – 'Levenslust' (Zest for life), 'Ontwikkeling' (Development), 'Kennis is macht' (Knowledge is power), etc. – inscribed into the brickwork. Most of the farm buildings were



Aerial photograph of the orthogonal structure of the landscape with the Second Institution, Esserheem, and the hospital complex (G.N.)

replaced and trees were replanted, a fine example being the lime trees (*Tilia*) along the Generaal van den Boschweg.

All these developments reinforced the existing orthogonal structure. The location of the institution buildings and farms was maintained to the extent possible. The importance of agriculture and forestry remained undiminished, now combined with industrial activity. The orthogonal structure of the original Colony was preserved and even reinforced, while the buildings added a new layer to the landscape.

PHASE 3 — 1918 – NOW

Change of scope, partly evolution into prison and privatisation

Between 1918 and 1953, building activities continued, but were more restrained: the replacement of some farms, the construction of a Recreation Building for staff (1922) and the conversion of the old Roman Catholic church into a school; a sawmill and a grain silo were added in the production zones; a building with individual cells and a guard's house (Rode Pannen), a military barracks and a staff training centre were added, as well as staff houses to comply with the gradual transformation into a prison and the accommodation of prisoners.

In the 1980s, when Veenhuizen stopped to function as an agricultural colony, large parts of the land were put in leasehold, farm buildings were sold and lots of buildings fell into decline as they were no longer occupied.

Public authorities started a major conservation programme and a search for new businesses.

However, not all the changes promoted conservation. The most important change in Veenhuizen was the construction of two new housing estates for staff in the centre on both sides of the Kerklaan. The first of these was built in the 1970s and the second in the 1990s.



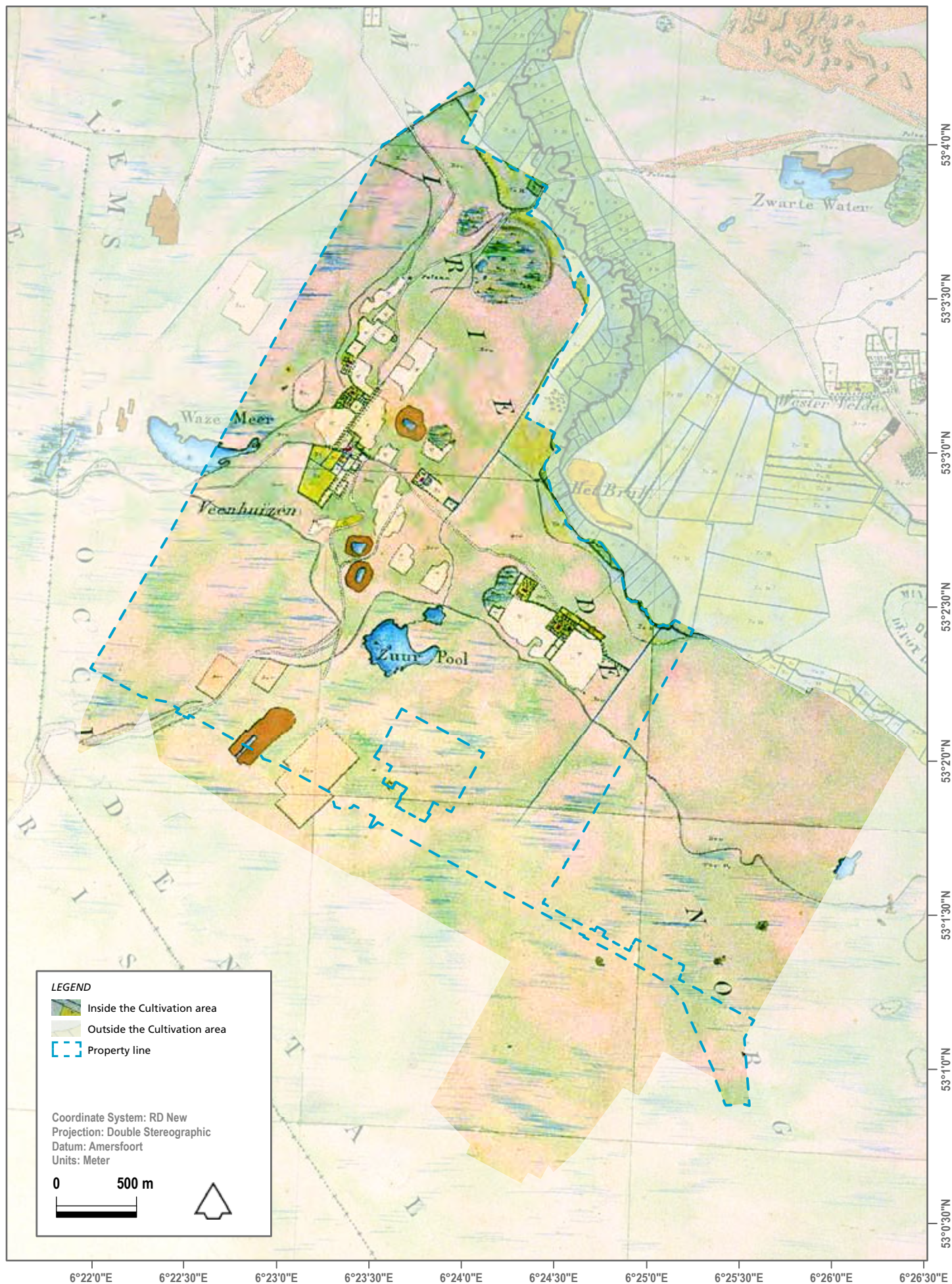
The two institutions created at the end of the 19th century, which were fitted with bars after 1953, were converted into guarded prison complexes at the end of the 1980s, whereby the monumental main buildings were treated with care. A new complex arose alongside the former First Foundation.

The arrival of the Ministry of Defence ammunition depot in the north-eastern corner of the area was also a change. In the 1990s, the depot function was considerably expanded.

M2.23 DESCRIPTION: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT BEFORE 1823

COMPONENT PART C: VEENHUIZEN

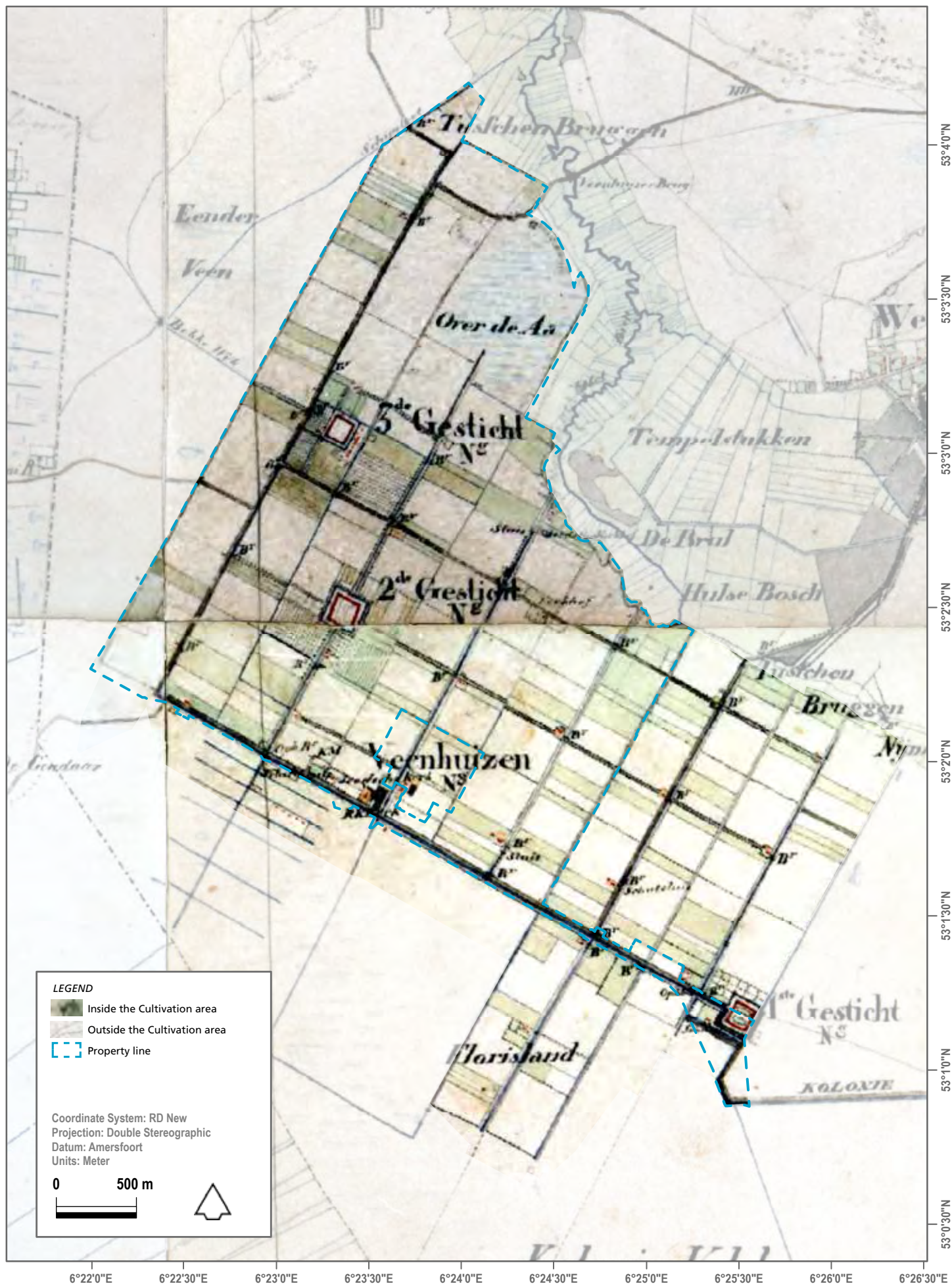
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M2.24 DESCRIPTION: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT 1824-1859

COMPONENT PART C: VEENHUIZEN

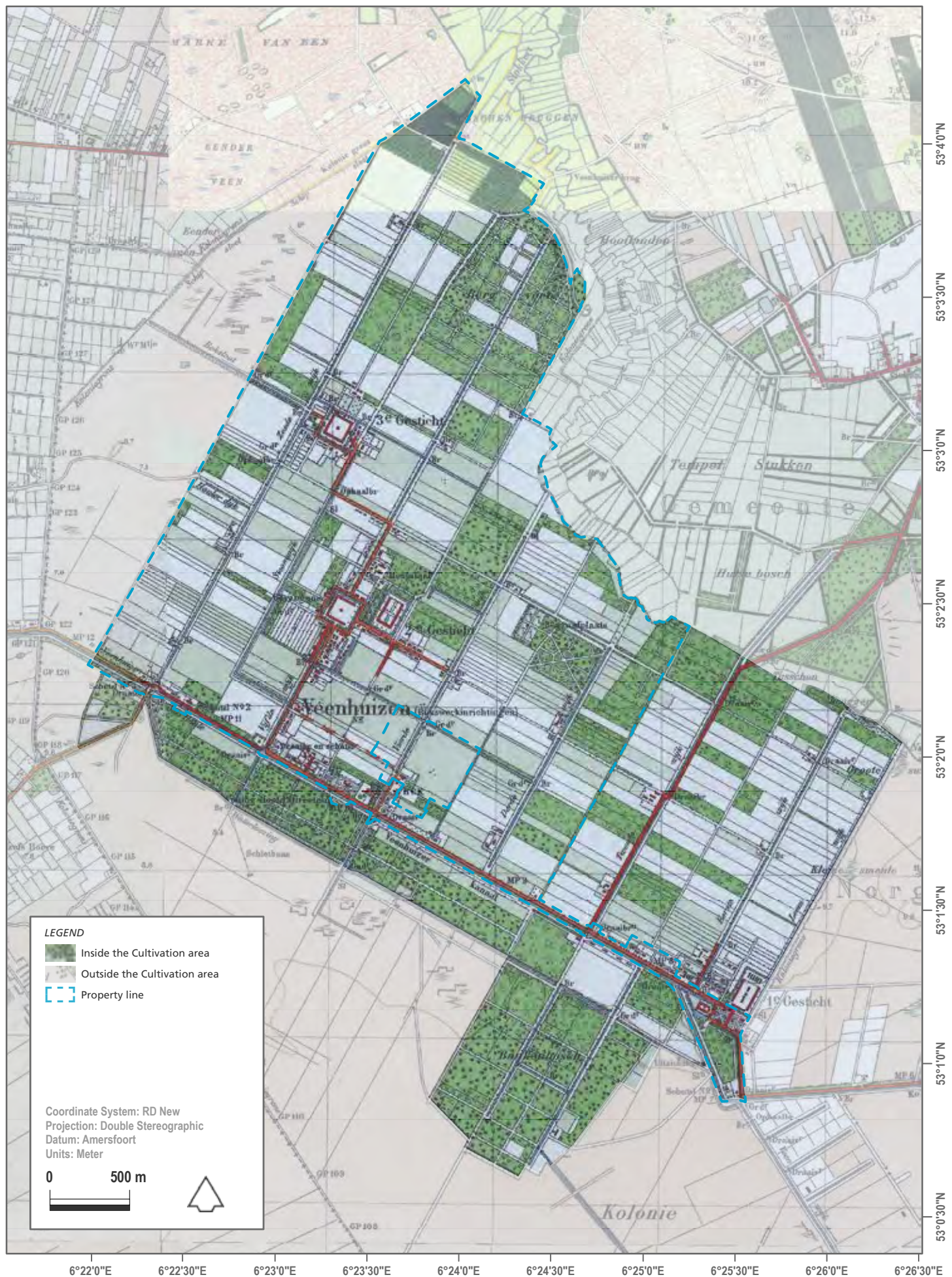
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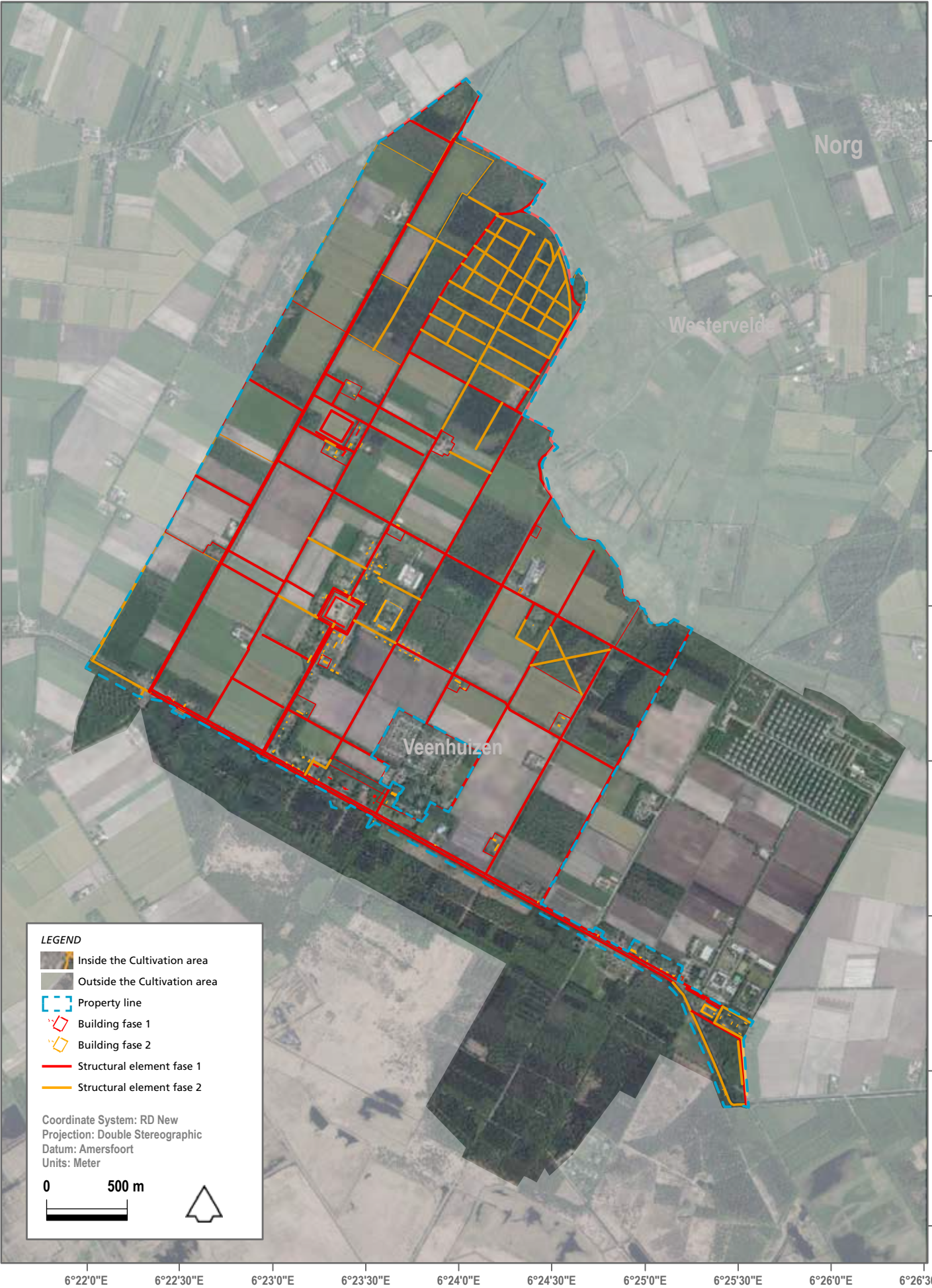
M2.25 DESCRIPTION: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT 1860-1918

COMPONENT PART C: VEENHUIZEN

1:30.000



M2.26 DESCRIPTION: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT ACTUAL SITUATION
COMPONENT PART C: VEENHUIZEN
1:30.000



MERKSPLAS (COLONY VII)

Milestones

1825	Start of an unfree Colony in the Southern part of the Kingdom
1830	Independence of Belgium
1842	Bankruptcy of Southern Society of Benevolence
1866	Act for the repression of begging and vagrancy
1870	Acquisition of Merksplas by the Belgian State, start of Building Programme
1891	Act Lejeune
1921	Prisoners with special needs sent to Merksplas Colony
1945	War damage
1947	First convicted criminals
1993	Abolition of Act Lejeune
2017	Opening of the Visitors' centre 'Colony 5-7'

Evolution of the landscape

BEFORE

Around 1800, west of the village of Merksplas which was built on sandy soil, a large heathland area was situated: the Bolcksche Heide. For centuries this land had been used as common ground by the inhabitants of Merksplas, Rijkevorsel, Bolck and Wortel. They grazed sheep on the heath and extracted peat in the peaty areas. From deeper layers of the soil, clay was extracted for small-scale brick production. Several dirt roads traversed the area and linked the

surrounding villages and hamlets. Fens and ponds were scattered across the heath.

PHASE 1 — 1825-1859

CREATION OF LANDSCAPE LAYER β¹

Creation of a new-large scale Colony landscape with an institution and large collective farms

The unfree Merksplas Colony (Colony VII) was to become the last one to be founded by the Society of Benevolence. For the same reasons as in Wortel, part of the Bolkse Heide was judged to be the best option. In 1823 the first lands were purchased, and in the two subsequent years the first buildings were realised. Here again, experiences gained in the other unfree Colonies were taken into account.

The 1820s central institution here was built according to the same plan as the institution in Ommerschans, and was set around a courtyard with two-storey pavilions in the eastern and western ranges. All its main facilities were accommodated inside: a school, an infirmary, staff housing, a spinning hall and a weaving mill. This was based on the experience at the central institution at Ommerschans.

The institution was fitted in an orthogonal grid of avenues dominated by two major avenues running the entire length of the property from north to south. A central avenue led to the cemetery to the north, where some early lime trees remain. There were outer avenues and cross avenues, also with trees, where some lines of oak trees survive, the overall pattern being similar to Wortel. Four large farms were positioned close to the institution and just outside the two main avenues. Sheepfolds were distributed further out. The layout had to accommodate public rights of way across the earlier heath, and these were tidied up into a slanting avenue, today's Steenweg op Rijkevorsel.

In 1842 the Colonies in Belgium went bankrupt and the Society of Benevolence for the Southern Netherlands was dissolved. In 1846 Prince Frederick,

the main creditor, purchased the property, and in 1862 sold it to four private owners. For a long time the buildings remained empty.

PHASE 2 — 1860-1918

ADDITION OF LANDSCAPE LAYER β^2

Addition of staff housing, institution buildings and production buildings within the existing landscape grid

Following the Act for the repression of begging and vagrancy (1866) the Colony of Merksplas was acquired by the Belgian State and made a new start in 1870 as 'State Agricultural Colony of Benevolence'. In order to accommodate enormous extra numbers of professional beggars and vagrants, an extensive building programme was initiated. As opposed to the first institution, the Colony became restricted to adult males and would no longer admit women, children or young people.

Under the direction of Victor Besme, the architect and urban planner who had also been responsible for the major renovation of the city of Brussels, Merksplas experienced a substantial increase in scale and grew into a monumental ensemble.

The initial pattern was accentuated and the hierarchical structure of the area was emphasised. The former plot layout was preserved.

Victor Besme created functional clusters (working, sleeping, attending church) alongside the existing axes.

The old central institution around the courtyard was given an upper storey; four symmetrically arranged dormitory blocks were built to the west of it, and in 1899 a huge 'chapel' was built beyond these. To the east, the two-storey pavilion was removed and a hospital was built. Extensive workshops were added on the north-east corner to offer additional work, commissioned by external companies. In 1907 there were eleven of these, and by 1910 as many as fifteen. To facilitate this industry, the local railway

↓
Activity on the central axis in Merksplas-Colony, between the construction of the sleeping pavilions and the construction of the Chapel, 1878-1897 (V.B.F.)

↓
Contrary to Christian custom, the main entrance of the chapel in Merksplas is on the east side, to allow the vagrants to go straight from the central institution to mass. (K.L.)



track (a narrow-gauge railway) was extended to the workhouses.

Over 80 semi-detached staff houses were added, many along the public road. They reflected the hierarchical structure of the Colony – the houses differed in size, details and surrounding garden according to the grade of the staff member living there.



↑
Activity on the central square
of the Large Farm of Merksplas
(K.L.)

The new provision for agriculture and horticulture was an enormous and very sophisticated model farm on the site of the former north west farm (the others had been removed). This model farm no doubt absorbed much labour, but important in this connection was the excavation around 1894 of a 6.5 metres wide moat, intended to surround the entire property but left incomplete on the southern side, where there were wetlands. The grid of avenues remained and was replanted with trees, many of them American oaks, now over a century old. Changes in the last hundred years have mainly consisted of more buildings attached to the institution and security measures.

On the basis of Lejeune's 1891 Act – which made a distinction between professional beggars and those who had become beggars through bad luck or old age – Merksplas was referred to as 'Beggars' House' for professional beggars. Merksplas gradually became more important as a closed institution; the number of inmates increased from 800 in 1879 to 5,291 in 1911.

PHASE 3 — 1918 – NOW

Change of scope, partly evolution into prison and privatisation

During both the First and the Second World War, the institution was partially empty. First it was used by the German occupiers, and later by the Allied Forces, as a shelter and as a prison for prisoners-of-war or political prisoners. After the First World War, a much smaller number of vagrants ended up in the Colonies, as a result of improved social legislation and the need for reconstruction workers. This led to stretches of temporary (partial) lack of occupancy and function changes.

During the inter-war period, special treatments were introduced for specific groups housed in Merksplas: a section was set up for epileptics and one for the "mentally weak", as well as a sanatorium for sufferers from tuberculosis. Each time this would lead to adjustments and reconstruction, but largely within the existing buildings. The setting up of the anthropological service, which provided guidance to the prisoners on a more individual basis, fitted into that policy.

After the Second World War, when Merksplas Colony was gradually transformed into a penal institution, renovation and modification works were carried out to modernise the main buildings, in compliance with the developments in legal standards for detention centres. The territory and some parts of the buildings continued to function as an agricultural colony.

For security reasons, the original pitched roofs with dormers were replaced by flat roofs. A library was set up, sports fields were added, as well as recreation areas and a cinema for the prisoners. At the site of the chicory roastery, the Institute for Penitentiary Staff, a training institute for prison guards, arose.

In 1991, due to the lack of tuberculosis patients, the sanatorium was demolished.

After 1993 the central institution was transformed into a high security prison with a secure, fenced perimeter, and it underwent subsequent changes. Furthermore, several buildings were demolished. The four sleeping pavilions were adjusted and modernised to become a reception centre for illegal immigrants. The façades, for example, were repainted in a salmon pink colour, with the exception of the chapel-oriented one, and the interior was modified. A new porter's lodge (1998) interrupts the visual radius between prison and chapel.

The State planned to auction off the rest of the territory, which had become obsolete, but this initiative was cancelled after major local protests.

In 1999 the whole Merksplas Colony area was listed as cultural heritage landscape.

Merksplas gradually became the shared property of the municipality of Merksplas, the Flemish Land Agency (VLM), the Agency for Nature and Forest (ANB), the Buildings Authority of the Federal Government (Regie der Gebouwen) and the Regional Water Company – all public bodies. Kempens Landschap, a landscape foundation established at the initiative of the province of Antwerp, coordinates the management accordingly.

In 2012 Kempens Landschap Foundation obtained a 30-million-euro subsidy (rising to 42 million euros) from the Flemish government to restore and repurpose the model farm, the chapel and other buildings not encompassed within the prison security fence. A 10-year masterplan was developed, and in 2019 the complex of farm buildings is being restored and will eventually be used as a hotel next to the restored Colony church, which is in use as an event venue.

Meanwhile a makeover of the institution is just beginning. The State is now in the process of reorganising the prison and has begun the process of stripping back some of the aesthetically less pleasing elements in order to convert the institution to suit alternative institutional purposes.



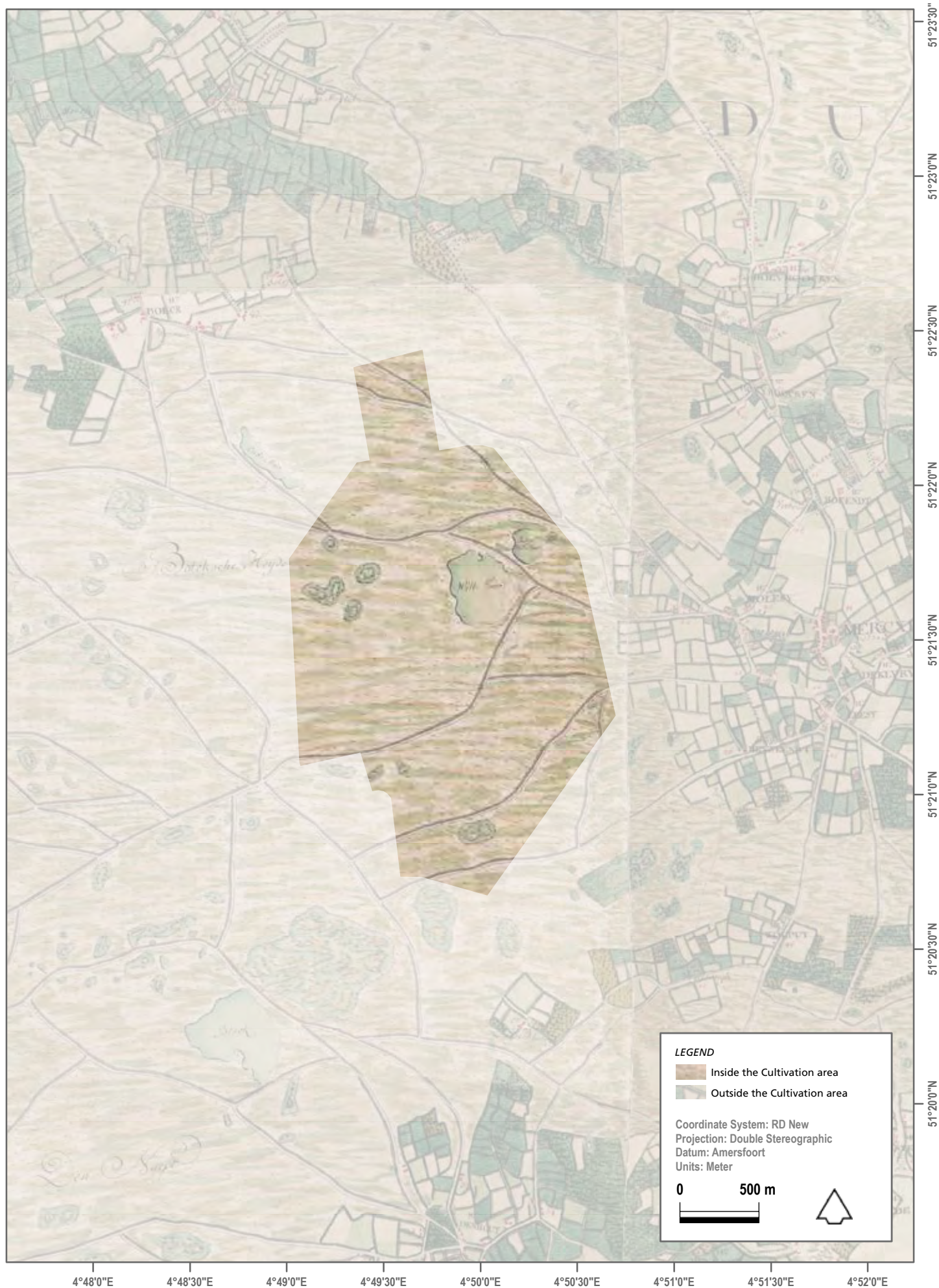
↑
In the Colony of Merksplas a multi-annual project has been set up for the restoration, adaptive re-use and landscape rehabilitation of the Large Farm (S.)

↑
On this aerial photograph, the contours and the orthogonal pattern in the landscape are clearly visible (L.V.)

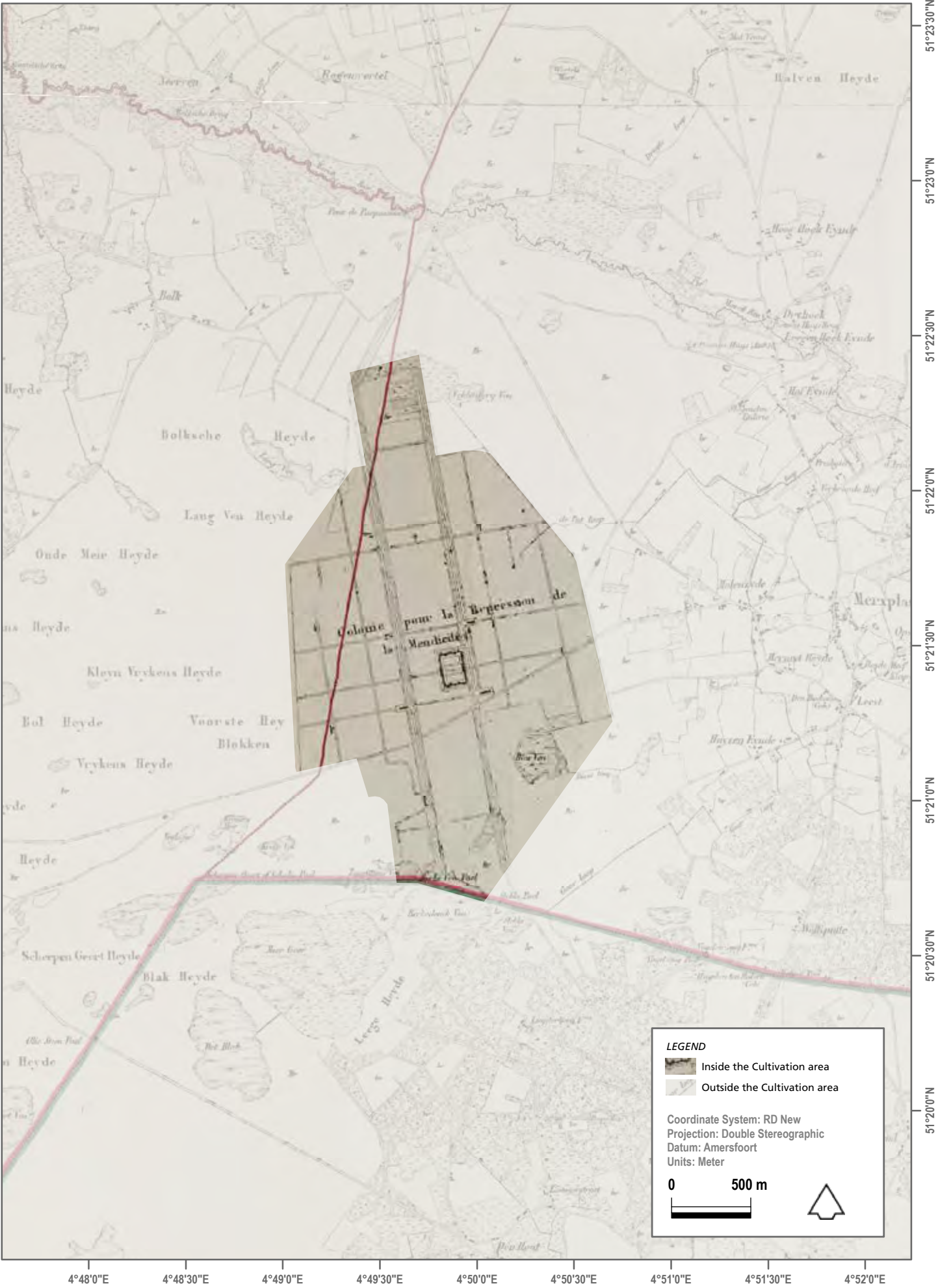
M2.27 DESCRIPTION: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT BEFORE 1825

COLONY VII: MERKSPLAS

1:30.000



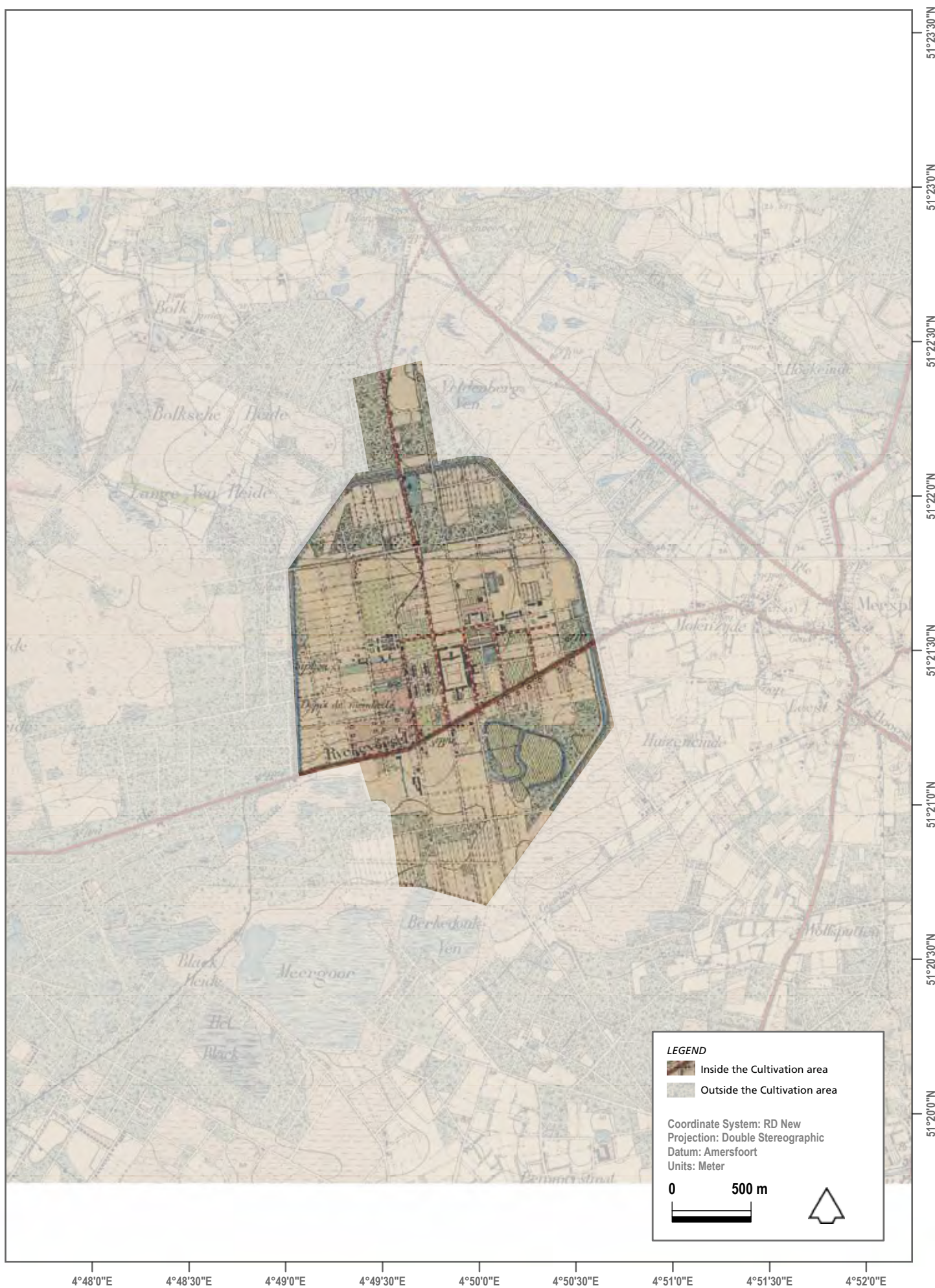
M2.28 DESCRIPTION: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT 1826-1859
COLONY VII: MERKSPLAS
1:30.000



M2.29 DESCRIPTION: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT 1860-1918

COLONY VII: MERKSPLAS

1:30.000



M2.30 DESCRIPTION: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT ACTUAL SITUATION
COLONY VII: MERKSPLAS
1:30.000



8 PEOPLE'S STORIES

Colony life had strict rules and lacked individual freedom. This meant, for example, that one could not just choose to leave the Colony. For most of the colonists, agricultural work was new and hard.

Return to ordinary society at one's own request was only possible once the colonist had paid off his or her debt; in such cases, official dismissal was granted. Consequently, not every colonist spent the same amount of time in the Colonies. Some colonists returned to ordinary society fairly quickly. The training received in the Colonies made it easier to find work outside the Colonies. Others remained in one of the Colonies until they died.

41-year-old **Cornelius Vanschepdael** and his 35-year-old wife wished to be admitted to the free agricultural Colony of Wortel, together with their two seven-year-old children. Because of their illiteracy, they had an emotional letter drawn up to the Permanent Committee of the Society of Benevolence. Vanschepdael begged the Permanent Committee to rescue him and his

family from their needy situation and to admit them to the free agricultural Colony of Wortel. The name Cornelius Vanschepdael was not found in the population registers of the free agricultural Colony. The family had not been admitted. — Wortel Colony

Jan Berends was 47 years old when he, as a former policeman, was sent to Frederiksoord by the Assen subcommittee. In 1820 and 1821 he received copper medals for services rendered. In 1825 he resigned from the Colony because he had found work in society. — Frederiksoord

Julien Dierick (27/02/1930, Tienen), was 18 years old when he was admitted to Merksplas. He had become involved with the wrong friends and had been arrested on account of his licentious behaviour. His father came to visit him every Sunday and his parents applied to let him live with them again. — Merksplas Colony

Petronella de Zwak (5/03/1837), was born as a colonist's daughter in Willemsoord. On 1 August 1857 she is allowed to leave the Colony for three months. On the day of departure, she gets married and as a result is forthwith formally dismissed from the Colony, because on account of entering into a marital commitment she is presumed to be able to take care of herself and her family. — Willemsoord

Some colonists were real 'Colony hoppers'. Due to circumstances, they moved from one Colony to another. The reason for this could have been that they had refused to cooperate, resulting in them being sent from a free Colony to an unfree Colony. This happened to several of the first colonists, who moved from Frederiksoord to Ommerschans, and in a later period from Merksplas to Veenhuizen.

Colonists could distinguish themselves by making a 'career' within the Colonies as a supervisor or a free farmer. The Society of Benevolence offered colonists the opportunity to move up as a free colonist

↓
Henry en Griet van Riesen in front of one of the large farms in the free Colonies, early 20th century (G.A.S.)



and become a tenant or free farmer in Ommerschans or Veenhuizen. A few succeeded. Up until 1859, 44 families had been transferred from Veenhuizen to the free Colonies.

As a 30-year-old, **Klaas Visser** was sent to Frederiksoord by the Grootebroek subcommittee. Almost immediately he was appointed as an assistant supervisor, but subsequently he had to resign and apply for an extra welfare allowance of 2 guilders per week on account of the large size of his household. In 1828, he wrote a brochure in defence of the Society and eventually, by then father of twelve children, he became a labourer in Veenhuizen until the day he died in 1863. – Frederiksoord – Veenhuizen

The **Van Essen** family, originally from Bolsward, was sent to the Colony during the initial period. The parents continued to live in Wilhelminaoord until they died. Two daughters married other colonists' children, so that they could continue to live in the Colony. One son joined the army, one became a deserter and the last one died in the Colony. – Veenhuizen – Wilhelminaoord

Antonie Gerards was born in Roermond and was a former confectionery shop assistant. In 1818, as a 45-year-old, he was sent to Frederiksoord by the Rotterdam subcommittee. In 1819, his son Jan became an assistant teacher. He himself in 1820 received a copper medal and in 1821 a silver medal for services rendered. In 1822 he became a free farmer in Ommerschans, where he remained until his death. – Frederiksoord – Ommerschans

Information on every colonist in the Colonies of Benevolence was kept in the archives. This concerned name, age, profession or otherwise, marital status, names of parents and children and their professions, and all kinds of comments about their lives in the Colony.

Tableau de la population des colonies néerlandaises depuis l'origine jusqu'en 1848.

ANNÉES.	COLONS LIBRES.	RÉPRESSIONS à Ommerschans.	GRANDS FERMIERS.	OUVRIERS.	VÉTÉRANS.	ORPHELINS, ENFANTS TROUVÉS ET ABANDONNÉS.	MENDIANTS.	TOTAL.
1819	346	.	.	.	.	.	.	346
1820	1600	.	.	.	.	.	.	1600
1821	2100	.	.	.	.	.	.	2100
1822	2100	.	.	.	.	.	.	2100
1823	2295	.	.	.	.	475	1053	3823
1824	2800	.	.	.	.	900	1100	4800
1825	3227	.	.	.	.	2174	1377	6778
1826	2126	106	166	658	231	2233	1581	7101
1827	1831	93	201	603	233	2059	1763	6783
1828	1858	92	183	355	473	2059	1763	6783
1829	2023	106	168	316	554	2340	1942	7451
1830	1946	84	171	358	533	2288	2111	7491
1831	2065	103	160	355	467	2297	2406	7853
1832	2112	90	165	405	452	2293	2242	7759
1833	2169	87	153	442	459	2477	2070	7857
1834	2179	80	141	470	464	2496	2100	7930
1835	2195	78	146	484	475	2386	2141	7905
1836	2185	75	150	498	490	2303	2200	7901
1837	2056	81	143	502	555	2268	2376	7981
1838	1930	91	150	515	541	2113	2406	7746
1839	2436	114	151	454	651	1811	2788	8405
1840	2477	99	172	454	651	1827	3205	8885
1841	2438	116	173	432	642	1839	3822	9462
1842	2495	129	176	499	606	1720	4788	10413
1843	2522	100	152	512	647	1614	4733	10280
1844	2497	97	171	534	632	1501	3682	9114
1845	2521	90	171	558	650	1385	4226	9601
1846	2476	138	171	580	647	1387	5171	10570
1847	2534	144	172	615	652	1428	5577	11122
1848	2559	131	195	612	663	1441	5496	11097
	66100	2324	3801	11211	12368	49114	74119	219037
Colons entretenus par la Société.								66,100
Colons entretenus par l'État.								152,937
Total.								219,037

↑
G. De Lurieu & H. Romand,
Etudes sur les colonies
agricoles, Paris, 1851, p. 405

Large numbers of people inhabited the Colonies of Benevolence. The table on the previous page, taken from the 1851 publication by De Lurieu and Romand, gives an indication of the number of colonists that stayed in the Colonies of Benevolence in the early years. It also demonstrates that the free Colonies (colons entretenus par la Société) and the unfree Colonies (colons entretenus par l'Etat) were regarded as one model by contemporaries.

From 1850 onwards, we so far only have indicative numbers. In the free Colonies of Frederiksoord, Wilhelminaoord and Willemsoord, the numbers of residents – approx. 2,500 – remained fairly constant until the beginning of the 20th century. By mid-19th century, Ommerschans was inhabited by about 2,000 colonists. In Veenhuizen, the picture is somewhat different. Around the middle of the 19th century, there was a constant number of about 6,000 colonists (6,421 in 1849). From 1869 onwards, orphans and women were no longer admitted to Veenhuizen, and the population consisted mainly of vagrants and beggars. This had an impact on the population number: in 1902 there were 3,826 colonists. From 1953 onwards, no more colonists were admitted and the last vagrant was dismissed in 1973.

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The different archives of the Colonies of Benevolence are open to the main public. People can search through a handy tool for their ancestors, for example in the Archives of Drenthe (D.A.)



Initially Wortel accommodated 127 colonists and Merksplas 490. The agricultural colonies peaked in 1910, with a total of around 6,000 colonists in both Colonies. By the time the law on vagrancy in Belgium was abolished in 1993, 250 colonists remained in Wortel Colony and 400 in Merksplas Colony. Although the Colonies were formally dissolved at that time, the remaining colonists could choose to leave or stay in the prison as a free person.

The extensive source material relating to the history of the Colonies of Benevolence consists mainly of archive documents of the various administrators of the Colonies: the Society of Benevolence and the respective national governments. It is kept in the Drenthe Archive in Assen (Netherlands), the National Archives in Brussels (Belgium) and the State Archives in Beveren (Belgium). In addition, the National Archive in The Hague (Netherlands) keeps records of the Departments and the personal archive of Johannes van den Bosch.

The major part of the archives of the Society of Benevolence and the State Labour Institutes has also been made digitally available by the Drenthe Archive. The personal files of colonists, which contain a great deal of correspondence of the colonists themselves, can be researched by personal name on www.allekolonisten.nl. In Flanders there is now a project so that in the future people can search the personal files of colonists.

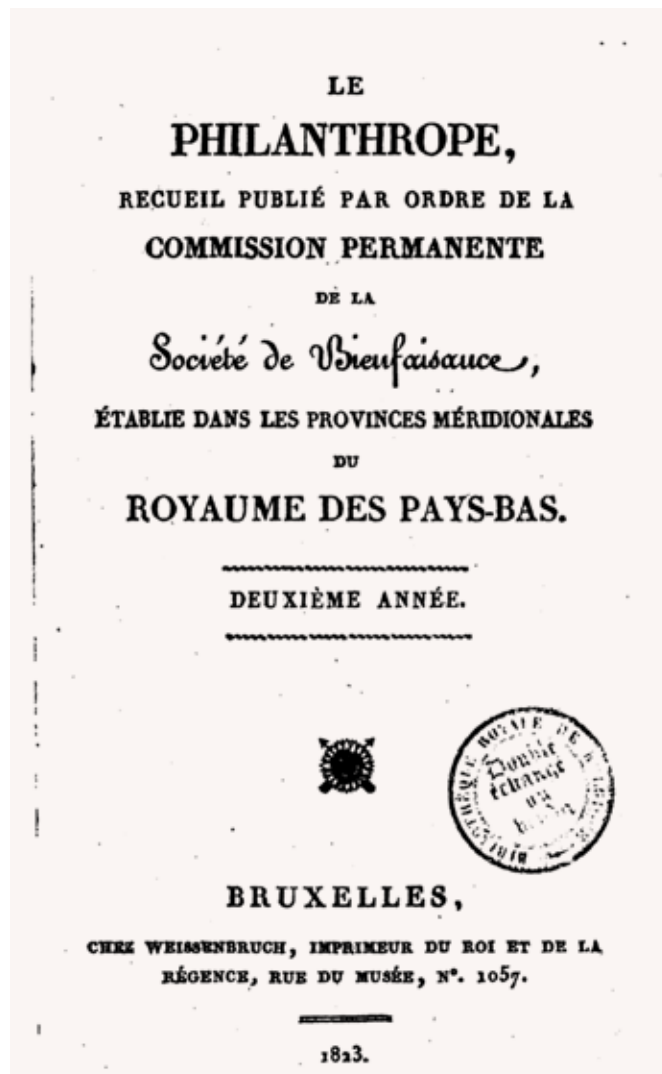
9 INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE AND LEGACY

Because of the perceived position of domestic colonies between poverty alleviation and prisons, the example of the Colonies of Benevolence frequently came up for review when legislation on poverty reduction or penal policy would be revised, often after economic or food crises (top down), but also from the bottom up (utopian social activism of individual citizens).

The reasons for the enthusiasm of contemporaries were easy to understand: the concept united a number of themes that had already been a focus of international attention before the publication of the plan by Johannes van den Bosch. The increase of agricultural land and self-sufficiency, poverty reduction, the makeability of man, the social role of the bourgeois elites and the State: all these were hot topics at that time, not only in the Netherlands but throughout the Western world. It was also an era of great upheavals: politically (the rise of the nation states), socially (the ideas of the Enlightenment), socio-economically (the Industrial Revolution), and demographically (the large population increase). The supply of food at reasonable prices was a major problem, and the growing number of paupers fuelled the bourgeoisie's fear of social unrest. There was a diligent search for possible solutions, of which this was one.

A well-oiled communication machine

The Society left nothing to chance in terms of networking and promotion. It benefited from the royal support of King William I and Prince Frederick, had contacts with people and organisations all over the world, and itself contributed significantly to the development and the practical application of its ideas, through the publication of the magazine *De Star*. This magazine was aimed primarily at providing information about the initiative and ensuring the continued commitment of their direct support base:



the citizens who participated financially, and the municipalities.

The Belgian, French language counterpart *Le Philanthrope* (*The Philanthropist*) was an even more powerful lever for the international image, if only because of the language. In 1821, Johannes van den Bosch's own discourse was also published in the French language. A further initiative of the Southern Society was the appointment of a select group of international honorary members.

↑
Cover of the magazine
"Le Philanthrope" 1823

Study tours and travelogues

Immediately after the implementation of the concept of the Colonies they became the object of study visits by a host of domestic and foreign interested parties, who subsequently published reports on the subject. This led to discussions in international journals, rather like comparative studies, through which the authors often advocated a similar development in their own country, frequently accompanied by concrete concepts adapted to local needs and legal context.

*'... The book in its present form is sent forth as the advocate of a practical experiment in Home Colonization, which has already received the support of many earnest friends.'*⁴⁶

*'La Hollande, plus libre dans sa politique intérieure, a donné un grand exemple don't l'Europe est appelée à profiter. Parmi les états que leur situation semble devoir exciter à imiter les institutions des Pays-Bas, et qui présentent les conditions les plus favorables pour obtenir les mêmes succès, la France est placée au premier rang. En effet, la France est essentiellement agricole. La population de quelques-unes de ses provinces est atteinte de paupérisme. ... Les avantages de ce système, qui embrasse toutes les classes souffrantes de la population, ne sont pas moins importants pour l'état et pour la société en général.'*⁴⁷

('Holland, with its more liberal domestic policy, has given a great example which Europe can benefit from. Among the states that might emulate the institutions of the Netherlands and that have the most favourable conditions to achieve similar success, France is prominent. Indeed, France is a largely agricultural nation. The population of some of its provinces is pauperised. ... The advantages of this system, which covers all the suffering classes of the population, are equally important for the state and for society in general.')

*'At a time when so many good and industrious families are driven from England to seek subsistence by emigration to a foreign clime, it is surely a subject of the highest interest to the English country gentleman, and the philanthropist in general, to know, that the waste lands and poor soil of his own country may be made capable of supporting not only such, but by good management, even the idle and vagrant, the offscourings, as it were, of society. It is on this account, and with the idea that a visit to Frederiksoord will prove gratifying to many English travellers, that a route, in other respects uninteresting, is here introduced'*⁴⁸

The international visitors had come to visit the Colonies with a deliberate view to their own specific disciplines: as philanthropists, scientists, officials, politicians... A number of visitors were sent by their own governments, in anticipation of forthcoming reform programmes.

Samuel von Gruner, for example, had in 1821 been commissioned by the Bavarian association of agricultural economy to undertake a study tour in the Low Countries. His actual subject was the organisation of agriculture and the techniques used, but he considered the Colonies sufficiently special to devote a chapter to the project.⁴⁹ A member of the Highland Society, of whom no further mention is made, also came to visit, primarily to study aspects of agricultural economy but, inspired by his journey, wrote a complete book about the Colonies.⁵⁰

Inspiration for the Anglo-Saxon world

In the United Kingdom, the Colonies of Benevolence were studied extensively in the run-up to the review of the English poor laws (UK) in 1834, at the orders of parliament but also on the initiative of individual parliamentarians or reformers. However, domestic colonies were not introduced as a policy solution, because Britain opted for a different, tougher approach.

‘Our aim is to establish in them a discipline so strict and repulsive that it acts as a terror to the poor and prevents them from entering’.

‘This policy was meant to convince the needy to accept any job at any place at any pay.’

There were several experiments by early utopian socialist reformers at approximately the same time as the emergence of the Colonies of Benevolence. These initiatives should be regarded as reactions against the background of overseas colonialism, which was often used in England as a release valve for solving social problems.

Specifically in Great Britain, the idea of ‘assisted emigration’⁵² was at the heart of the debate when the Colonies of Benevolence were created. It involved sending poor people as settlers to overseas colonies, with the cost of transport paid by the government or the landlord, but sometimes also by their parish. The actual implementation of assisted emigration did not start before 1833 and the integration in the New Poor Law of 1834, and it concerned only a minority of the poor. Most of them emigrated at their own expense.

In 1840, together with W. Galpin and F. Bate, Robert Owen founded the Home Colonization Society, which engaged in fundraising and published material to convince parties of the usefulness of this type of colony. The model he published for this purpose in 1841 was based on segregation and agricultural labour, as well as on voluntary entry of the idle poor. However, he assumed a system of collective ownership of the members. Owen had many supporters, who assisted him either financially or morally – but the plan was never implemented.⁵³

Finally, at the end of the 19th/beginning of the 20th century, several agricultural colonies were established specifically for the unemployed by socially critical organisations.

Some of these were of Protestant origin. They were permeated by a Christian revival mentality that was in fact pan-European and called for a fight against ‘anti-Christian’ socialism and the restoration of Christian values. Agricultural colonies were one of the initiatives they included in this context. William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, was one of their most famous defenders.⁵⁴ He proposed closed home colonies to reform people through labour, similar to earlier examples. The agricultural colony of Hadleigh was founded by him, to offer employment to the unemployed.

There were also more socialism-inspired champions, such as Charles Booth, James Mavor and others. The latter advocated a voluntary, open system, as introduced in Germany at the end of the 1860s (Arbeiterkolonien) – they considered this to be a healthy method of assistance (open-air, with a fixed rhythm) and favoured a non-religious initiative. They also felt that it should primarily be a temporary ‘training facility’, with no emphasis on generating revenue for the government.⁵⁵

Harold E. Moore had advised on the establishment of the colonies of the Salvation Army. The experiences he had gained in that connection – for instance in Frederiksoord – he incorporated in the book *Back to the land*.⁵⁶ For social reformers, that book in turn led to experiments such as the Popular Union Colony in the United Kingdom (1904-1912): an agricultural colony linked to a workhouse.

The dissemination of the home colony concept did not remain limited to the European continent. In his report on the 1905 International Prison Congress in Budapest, addressed to the governor of Illinois in the U.S., Charles Richmond Henderson included recommendations of a British expert committee, with the advice to establish colonies along the lines of Merksplas.

‘The committee recommends a system of penal labor colonies similar to that of the Belgian colonies as a new method of dealing with the

vagrants in England. In the penal labor colony (1) the workman out of employment is treated as a patient and with care, and not as a criminal with imprisonment. His downward career is arrested before his technical skill is lost; (2) the whole vagrant class is subjected to the steadying influence of regular life and regular work for long periods of time, and, while the colony may be unable to re-establish him in independent life, yet his life will be made pleasant and he will be prevented from recruiting the criminal class; (3) the cost of maintaining a vagrant is less than in prison, for in the colony he is self-supporting. As he must be taken care of, the committee recommends a more economical as well as a more corrective method.⁵⁷

France

In the 1830s the initiative received lots of attention in France. The reason for this was a series of essays and monographs by French writers on the subject of poverty reduction and the role of agricultural colonies in this respect incorporating a comprehensive analysis of the Society of Benevolence and its Colonies.

‘Lorsque la publication du mémoire de M. le général Van den Bosch, sur la colonie agricole de Frederik’s-Oord eut fait connaître à l’Europe l’existence et les succès de cette patriotique et philanthropique institution, plusieurs écrivains s’empressèrent de la proposer pour modèle à la France. [...] Successivement MM. Deby, de Ferussac, Léopold de Bellaing, de Marivault, Eugène de Monglave, Bidaut et de Rayneville, appelèrent l’attention publique sur les établissements agricoles de bienfaisance des Pays-Bas.’⁵⁸

‘When the publication of the discourse by General Van den Bosch on the agricultural colony of Frederiksoord had informed Europe of the existence and success of this patriotic and

philanthropic institution, several writers hastened to propose a model for France. [...] Successively MM. Deby, de Ferussac, Leopold de Bellaing, de Marivault, Eugène de Monglave, Bidaut et de Rayneville called public attention to the agricultural benevolence establishments in the Netherlands.’

There were other authors apart from the names mentioned above: Alban de Villeneuve-Bargemont was known for his role in the first social legislation of France, and Joseph-Marie de Gérando was Secretary General at the French Ministry of the Interior for seventeen years.

However, tone and content of the publications were subject to change. From almost blind admiration for the ambitious plan, the high level of dynamism and the commitment of the members, the emphasis shifted to a more critical assessment of the project, based on its actual merits: the financial issues, the lack of freedom of the colonists, the living conditions in the unfree Colonies. The Society’s solution was not rejected, but there were calls for adaptation of the concept to eliminate the weaknesses from the system.

In France and Belgium, the home colonies which were effectively realised fitted in with the desired reform of penal institutions for young people and ex-prisoners. A. de Toqueville drew attention to them in the report he wrote together with Gustave de Beaumont in 1831, which included a description of the Colonies of Benevolence in the appendix.⁵⁹ He saw them as a milder form of imprisonment, which moreover promised a positive power of reform. This was in line with a general social trend of resistance to imprisoning young people together with adult offenders, which was considered to be more likely to have a negative impact than result in improvement.

De Tocqueville was one of the directors of the youth institution Mettray (1839) – a domestic colony for young convicts. It was a private institution, founded by A. Demetz, who was highly religious, through his

organisation La Société Paternelle pour l'éducation morale et professionnelle des jeunes. Demetz was familiar with the example of the Colonies of Benevolence, but had also visited the institution Rauhes Haus and was charmed by the family atmosphere of the latter.

The founder of the Rauhes Haus in Hamburg, Johann Hinrich Wichern, emerged from the Protestant movement 'Innere Mission' which had Theodor Fliedner as one of its founders. In 1831, Fliedner published an account of his journey to the Netherlands and Great Britain, in which he reported critically on the subject of the Colonies, but at the same time certainly considered them suitable for emulation.

*'Die vorstehende Kritik der Kolonien beurkundet wohl deutlich genug, welchen hohen Werth ich diesen Anstalten beilege, und für Wünschenswerth ich es halte, dass jede Staat ähnliche Kolonien, mit Vermeidung ihrer Mängel anlegen, und dadurch seinen Armen und Bettlern ein Dauerndes, selbsterworbenes Brod mit Beförderung ihres Seelenwohls verschaffen möge. Auch unser Preussen hat noch unangebauten Haiden genug in Westphalen, Niederrhein, Pommern und andern Provinzen, um solche Kolonien anzulegen, und seine Bettler- und Landarmen Häuser sind vielfach noch so kostspielig (...) dass sehr Vieles von jenen Anstalten Niederlands mit grossem Nutzen nachgeahmt werden könnte.'*⁶⁰

'The foregoing review of the Colonies probably makes clear the great value I attribute to these institutions, and that I would wish that every state would create similar colonies, avoiding their shortcomings, and so provide their poor and beggars with constant and, self-earned food, at the same time stimulating the welfare of their soul. Our Prussia has also enough uncultivated heaths in Westphalia, Lower Rhine, Pomerania and other provinces to create such colonies, while its beggars institutions and poor houses are

often still very expensive (...) that emulating the Dutch institutions to an extent could bring great benefits.'

In a sense, Mettray was a modified unfree Colony. Young people lived in smaller groups, in a setting that was meant to evoke a family context (with guards). Life was strictly regulated and collective. The residents wore a uniform. They were trained in a craft or received horticultural training and worked on the land. There was a strong emphasis on moral education through religion and compulsory silence during work. They stayed there until they reached the age of majority.

The uniform buildings were placed around a square with a central church. As in later horticultural schools, there was a park-like educational garden surrounded by fields – not laid out according to a systematic pattern. Mettray still exists and is now a care facility for young people.

Mettray was widely emulated throughout France and greater Europe – similar colonies were established by various private organisations as well as by urban or provincial governments. In France, the law of 1850 on the education and guidance of young prisoners tried to generalise the use of privately-run agricultural colonies such as Mettray, despite the negative advice of two of the inspectors of the Ministry of Justice.

Their judgement concerned the high price and poor results in transforming youngsters into farmers. In addition, the department of Justice preferred more repressive State-run institutions for reasons of asserting control.

In 1850, 16 colonies were in operation, but none were supported in the same way by the Administration. By 1897, most had disappeared due to lack of money.

In Belgium, the Ruiselede colony was built in 1851 as a reform school for young people – mainly imprisoned on charges of vagrancy. The institution

was established following a report by E. Ducpétiaux to the Minister of Justice,⁶¹ mapping the phenomenon of agricultural colonies in detail, including the failure of the Colonies of Benevolence in Wortel and Merksplas, which Ducpétiaux had officially followed until 1842.

Ruiselede was started as a state institution for boys (and is still a closed institution for young people). The institution consists of a symmetrical building complex, with a large farm and associated arable and horticultural land, and a church. Like Mettray, Ruiselede is characterised by smaller groups.

Germany

The German Arbeiterkolonien of the end of the 19th century were a social employment programme offering temporary agricultural work, inspired by the Protestant revival concept. Pastor Friedrich von Bodelschwingh, founder of the institutions in Bielefeld, was at the basis of the entire series of 25 colonies, which were operational throughout Germany by 1893. He drew inspiration from Merksplas Colony at the end of the 1870s.

Large differences

Domestic colonies presented a very wide variety in characteristics and served different purposes and target groups, but all shared the ambition of transformation through agricultural labour.⁶²

However, they differentiated in:

- their scope of transformation of people versus transformation of a societal system (radically challenging/reforming system versus acting as guardian of social order)
- the way they promoted collective or private property
- their voluntary versus involuntary character
- religious versus non-religious aim
- their funding: private/ public-private / governmental
- the use of the landscaped environment as part of their approach versus didactic value of 'farm labour in itself'
- the degree to which education was integrated at the core of their concept
- the scale of their operations: from very small (a house with a garden) up to the scale of the Colonies of Benevolence

